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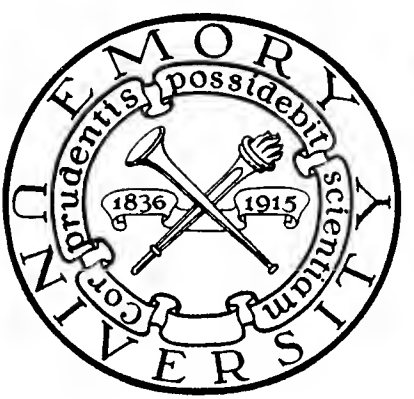

ONE LIFE, ONE LOVE

A Novel

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET," "VIXEN," "ISHMAEL,"
"THE DAY WILL COME"
ETC.

Stereotyped Edition

LONDON
SIMPKIN, MARSHALL, HAMILTON, KENT & CO. LIMITED
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ONE LIFE, ONE LOVE.

CHAPTER I.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

"WIFE," cried Robert Hatrell, coming into the sunny morning-room where his wife and her daughter were sitting, the little girl in the broad recessed window, with her tutor, puzzling over her first French verb, while in front of the window a bed of pink tulips were waving and nodding their rosy cups in the soft April wind. "Wife, can you guess what good news I have brought you?"

"Indeed, no, Rob, unless it is that you are going to take me for a long drive—to Burnham Beeches, or the Forest, for instance."

She was not one of the indifferent, off-hand wives, who hardly look up from their work or their book when a husband comes back from his morning walk. She was not even one of those excellent matrons whose affections are concentrated upon the nursery, for whom babies have a higher claim than the bread-winner. Clara Hatrell adored her husband, and was not ashamed to show her affection for him in those trivial ways which mark the line between love and toleration. She laid down her pen, rose from the little Davenport, and went over to meet him as he came flushed and smiling into the sunshiny room.

"Better than that; ever so much better than that!"

"Not another diamond bracelet, I hope," she said, with a touch of petulance.

He had a passion for buying things, an amiable weakness which had been pleasant enough up to a certain point, but to which his wife objected when it passed the limits of common sense.

"Ungrateful woman!"

"You know, dear, I have more jewellery already than I care to wear,"

"It is not a bracelet. It is not any kind of ornament for the most ungrateful of women. Will that satisfy you?"

The little girl never looked up from the indicative mood. The glory of beginning a foreign language overcame her sense of weariness. The tutor never raised his eyelids from the eyes which watched the child puzzling herself over her book; but he was listening intently all the same.

"Not quite, Rob. You have been buying something. I can see it in the sparkle of your eye. You have been wasting a heap of money upon some trumpery or other."

"I have not spent—or incurred a liability—to the extent of three and sixpence since I left this house; but I have heard something which may lead to my spending three or four thousand pounds before we are much older."

"The land!" cried Clara, clasping her hands. "My meadows, my gardens."

"Precisely. Young Florestan has made up his mind to part with some superfluous territory; and as soon as the lawyers are ready to sell I shall be able to buy the extra acres for which my fair land-grabber has been pining."

"What rapture! And we shall be able to extend the river-terrace to twice its present length, and I shall have an Italian garden—a real Italian garden—with marble balustrades, and Pan and Syrinx, and walls of cypress and yew, and a long avenue of junipers——"

"My dearest dreamer, your cypress walls will take thirty or forty years to arrive at perfection."

"They will be something to look forward to in our old age; and we shall have the pleasure of planning everything, and watching the things grow. The garden will be our own creation, an emanation from our very selves. Adam and Eve would have tried harder to be worthy of Eden if it had not been ready-made."

Robert Hatrell had the sanguine temperament, and had a knack of adopting any idea of his wife's with even greater enthusiasm than her own. He was never more pleased than in pleasing her, yet had marked tastes of his own—pictures, statues, foreign travel; a man of no profession or pursuit, and of an energetic temper—energetic even to restlessness.

He was an only son, and had been lord of himself and of between three and four thousand a year at an age when most young men are still dependent upon parental benevolence. He had left Oxford

without a degree, but with a reputation for considerable talent of an artistic, social, and generally intangible character; he had travelled and amused himself for half-a-dozen years, enjoying independence, health, and high spirits to the uttermost. He had had his adventures, his disillusions, and his disappointments during that long holiday; and he had only sobered and settled down on marrying one of the prettiest girls of her season, a girl fresh from a Buckinghamshire valley, where her people had been lords of the soil before the Wars of the Roscs. She had practically no money, but she came of a race which claimed kindred with Hampden. She had the calm and chaste beauty of the Florentine Venus; she neither flirted nor talked slang; and she knew no more about racing or cards than if she had been still in the nursery. In a word, she was a girl whom Wordsworth or Milton would have accepted as the fairest type of English girlhood; and Robert Hatrell considered himself very lucky in winning her for his wife.

His father had been a civil-engineer—a genius, successful in all he touched. The rewards of his profession had been large and rapid, and had tempted him to overwork, which resulted eventually, after many notes of warning, in an appallingly sudden death. Robert inherited with the engineer's fortune the engineer's ardent temperament, which, on his part, showed itself in superfluous energy—a feverish activity about trifles. There were times when, in spite of fortune, happy home, and idolized wife, he felt that he had made a mistake in his life, that it would have been better for him to have worked hard and had a career like his father's. He read of the two Brunels and the two Stephensons with a pang of regret.

But on this bright April morning there was no shadow upon Robert Hatrell's happiness; no sense of a purpose and a career missed; a life in somewise wasted. He talked of the additional land as if it were the beginning and end of existence.

"It will just make the place perfect, Clara," he said. "You are always right, love—we were terribly cramped when we made our garden. The river-terracc is well enough, but we have no depth. The grounds are unworthy of the house."

He opened a glass door and went out upon the lawn, his wife following him. They stood side by side and looked first at the house, and then at the garden, this way and that, and then at the river.

Eleven years ago, on the eve of their marriage, he and Clara,

riding together one morning, on the Berkshire side of the river, between Reading and Henley, had discovered an old-fashioned cottage in a good-sized garden, with a lawn sloping to the river. There were a couple of meadows and an orchard behind the cottage, divided from it by a road, but the best part of the whole thing was this river frontage of less than a quarter of a mile. The cottage was to be let or sold, as a lop-sided board announced to the world at large; and the neglected garden gave evidence that it was a long time since the last tenant had departed and left the place to gradual decay. The lovers dismounted, found a door on the latch, and explored the house, which was empty of human life; albeit some shabby furniture and a sandy cat in the kitchen indicated that a caretaker had her habitation on the premises.

The thick walls, leaded casements, quaint old staircase and corridor fascinated Clara. She was passionately fond of the river and of the country in which she had been born and reared. Her future home was to be in Chester Street, Belgravia; but the exploration of the cottage suggested a delightful alternative.

"How sweet it would be to have this for a summer home, Rob!" she said; and Robert, who was at the period of his most abject slavery, instantly decided that the cottage must be hers.

The negotiation of the purchase gave him something to do. Alterations and additions and improvements would make a delightful occupation for husband and wife after the honeymoon. The house in Chester Street had been taken on a seven, fourteen, or twenty-one years' lease; a most common-place business. It was furnished and ready for them. Nothing more to do there. But this cottage would afford endless work. He began to plan at once, even before he knew the owner's name. Of course they must build a drawing-room, and dining-room, and a couple of bedrooms, boudoir, and dressing-room on the floor above. The present sitting-room would make a pretty hall by knocking down a lath and plaster partition, and throwing in the passage. Those thick walls and great chestnut beams were delightful. He saw his way to an artistic-looking house for very little money.

"I am nothing if not inventive," he said. "Remember what my father did. Some faint trickle from that deep stream of intellectual force ought to have come down to me."

"I'm sure you would be quite as clever as your father, and would plan viaducts and things as he did, if it were required of you," said Clara, admiringly.

The cottage was bought, and was the plaything of the first and second year of their married life—their chief amusement, occupation, and excitement. The cottage was always with them, and the greatest pleasure of their foreign wanderings was found in bric-a-brac shops, searching out strange and picturesque things for their new home. At the end of those two years the cottage was no longer a cottage, but a spacious and luxurious house, of moderate elevation, with many gables, a tiled roof, and tall chimney stacks. Mr. Hatrell had remembered Ruskin's axiom that no house can be picturesque in which the roof is not a prominent feature. The garden had been made as perfect as its narrow limits would allow; but everybody felt, and many people said, that the house was too large and too handsome for its surroundings.

They had occupied it for nine years, and the daughter who had entered it a year-old baby was old enough to learn her first French verb, although her education had been conducted in a very leisurely manner; yet only to-day had come the hope of possessing the adjoining land, which had been in the hands of trustees until two or three months ago, when the heir had come of age.

The trustees had been unable to sell, and the heir had been unwilling to sell, but a month at Monte Carlo had brought about a change of tactics, and this morning Mr. Hatrell had seen the land agent, and had been told that young Florestan would be glad of an offer for so much of the home farm as might be wanted to perfect Mr. Hatrell's holding.

"You will understand that as there is a river frontage, and the land is eminently adapted for building, we shall want a good price for it," said the agent.

"Let me know your price without an hour's unnecessary delay. I'd rather not make an offer. I can't be buyer and seller too," answered Hatrell; and then he walked home at five miles an hour, brimming over with delight, triumphant at having such news to carry to his wife.

They looked this way and that, and talked, and pointed out boundaries and distances. Those dear old chestnuts in the hedge-row must come down; the river-terrace must be continued along there; the meadow would have to be levelled into an upper and lower lawn; and there must be stone balustrades and flights of steps.

"I'm afraid it will cost a fortune," said Clara.

"We can afford to do it, dear, now we have given up the house in Chester Street."

They had discovered two or three years before that a London house was a useless expense—an incubus even, since it obliged them to live in town when they would rather be in the country. They both infinitely preferred life in Berkshire to life in Belgravia, so on the expiry of the first term of the lease they gave up the house, and sold the bulk of the furniture to the incoming tenant. And now they could spend as much of their time as they liked in the house by the river, and could winter in Italy or Switzerland without any scruples of conscience. When they wanted to reside in London there were hotels ready to receive them; and, on the other hand, they could enjoy many metropolitan pleasures while resident at River Lawn, since the journey to the West End took very little more than an hour.

The child had stuck to her book with dogged determination while her mother and father were indoors; but the sight of them standing on the lawn was too much for her. Their animated gestures filled her with curiosity. What were they pointing out to each other? What could they be talking about?

Her tutor laid his long white fingers upon her shoulder, with the slow caressing touch she knew so well.

"Where are your thoughts flying, Daisy?" he said gently. "We shan't manage our two tenses if you don't attend better."

"I'm rather tired," said the little girl, "and I want to go to mother."

"Let it be one tense, then, only one; but it must be quite perfect. Shut your book, and tell me the French for 'I am.'"

"Je suis," replied Daisy, watching those sunlit figures on the lawn—her mother in a gown of cream-white woollen stuff, with an orange-coloured handkerchief knotted loosely round her neck.

The tutor—tutor for love, not gain—never looked up. Dreamy at the best of times, he was in an unusually meditative mood this morning. He seemed to be giving a small portion of his brain-power to the child, while all the rest was lost in a labyrinth of thought.

The present tense, indicative mood, of the verb "être" was repeated without a hitch.

"Good," said Ambrose Arden; "we will have the imperfect tense to-morrow. And now you may run in the garden for half an hour, before we read our English history. Perhaps you would like to read out of doors."

"Very much, if you please, Uncle Ambrose."

She put her arms round his neck, and laid her soft cheek against his silky hair. He had pale auburn hair, which he wore rather long; his skin was as fair as a woman's. Hair and complexion, and the clear bright blue of the large dreamy eyes, gave something of effeminacy to his appearance; but his features were large and boldly cut, a longish nose inclining to aquiline, a strong chin, and wide, resolute mouth. He was tall and broad-shouldered, but had the stoop of a bookish man, whose life was for the most part sedentary. All his movements were slow and deliberate, and his full, deep voice had slow and deliberate modulations—a legato movement that answered to the gliding movements of his figure.

Daisy flew out to the lawn, like an arrow from a bow. She had her mother's hazel eyes and her mother's vivacity, slim, straight, and swift as Atalanta, with dark brown hair flying in the wind. Ambrose Arden rose slowly, and sauntered after her.

"May I inquire the cause of all this excitement?" he asked, as he approached husband and wife.

"Didn't you hear just now, you man of ice?" Robert Hatrell exclaimed laughingly. "Can it be that mundane things have no interest for you, that you have only ears and mind for the abstract?"

"I heard something about Florestan's land."

"Precisely. Had you been more keenly interested in the welfare of your friends you might have heard that I have now the chance of buying the additional ground my poor Clara has been pining for ever since we made our garden."

"I am very glad," said Arden, quietly.

"You don't look a bit glad," said Clara.

"I am one of those cold-blooded people whose faces do not express what they feel. I am heartily glad, all the same—since you and Hatrell are glad."

"Oh, it is Clara's business. This place is Clara's creation. She can do what she likes with it," said Hatrell. "I'll have Cruden over this afternoon to plan the new garden."

"But, my dear Rob, is it worth while to begin our plans before we are even sure of the ground?" remonstrated common sense in the person of his wife.

"We are quite sure. It is only a question of a hundred or two, more or less. Florestan wants money, and he can spare the land; we want the land, and we can spare the money. There is always so much time lost in beginning anything. I'll send for Cruden at once."

"Yes, and you and Mr. Cruden will have planned every detail before I can make a single suggestion," said Clara. "I know your impetuosity of old."

"My love, the new garden was your idea, and you shall carry it out in your own way," replied her husband, "but we may as well see Cruden's plan. He is the best man in this part of the country for a job of that kind. We will do nothing without your approval."

Clara gave a little impatient sigh. She knew so well for how little her approval would count when once the landscape gardener and his men were set at work; how little pause or leisure there would be for thought or taste, and how the whole business would be hurried along by her husband's impatient temper till all was fixed and completed—for good or ill. And she knew that the loveliest gardens she had seen had been the slow and gradual growth of care and thought.

Mr. Cruden, however, was a prince among nurserymen. He had taste and knowledge, and many acres of nursery ground; and, if he were but allowed time, all would no doubt be well.

Ambrose Arden strolled down to his favourite seat under a weeping willow, which overhung the river and made a tent of tender green above a rustic bench and table. There were cushions scattered on the ground under the tree, and there was a doll sitting with its sawdust back propped up against the trunk. These and various lesson-books indicated that the spot was Daisy's chosen resort. Here in fine weather she carried on her education, under the affectionate guidance of her father's friend and neighbour, Ambrose Arden.

When they bought their cottage at Lamford, Mr. and Mrs. Hatrell found Mr. Arden established in a small, square brick house on the opposite side of the road, one of those ugly, useful houses which people used to build seventy or eighty years ago amidst loveliest scenery, houses which imply that at a certain period of English history the sense of beauty was dead in the English mind. Houses, as square and as unbeautiful, are built by the dozen nowadays on the outskirts of French provincial towns, and seem the natural outcome of the small bourgeois retired from business. Time and the mild, moist atmosphere of the Thames Valley had dealt kindly with this sordid building, and had covered it from basement to roof with roses, passion-flower, woodbine, and trumpet-ash. So clothed, and standing in the midst of an old-fashioned garden, it had assumed a certain humble prettiness, as the

commonest labourer's cottage will, when it has time to ripen. It was quite good enough for Ambrose Arden, the Oxford scholar, the man who had carried off some of the chief prizes of a university career, but whose name, from a social point of view, had been written in water. Even the men of his year had scarcely heard of him, or at most had heard of him as a poor creature, who neither rowed nor hunted, nor spoke at the Union, nor gave wines; a creature who only sat in his rooms and read.

He came to the square brick house at Lamford, a widower with one child, a boy of three years old. He had married a parson's daughter in a village among the Welsh hills, and had lived with her in that quiet, far-off world until their brief married life ended in sudden darkness. Her son was just beginning to run alone, when the young mother, who had never given up the pious and charitable ways of the vicar's daughter, took the contagion of a deadly fever by a sick-bed in a remote homestead, hidden among the hills, too far for the elderly vicar to carry words of hope and consolation. Ambrose Arden's wife had taken the duty of visiting these people upon herself. The woman's husband had an evil repute, was known to have ill-used his wife, and she was dying of some mysterious disease, alone and friendless. Amy Arden went daily to visit her, Ambrose walking with her, and while his wife read or talked to the sick woman, he sat on a little rustic bridge that spanned a trout-stream hard by, reading the book he always carried in the pocket of his shooting-coat. Never had Ambrose Arden been known to leave his house unsupplied with intellectual food of some kind.

Whether the dying woman's malady was contagious, or whether the house itself reeked with drain-poison the doctors never decided. All Ambrose knew was that his young wife fell a victim to her own large-hearted charity. From her childhood she had ministered to her father's flock, and she was stricken with death in the path of duty.

Mr. Arden left the rustic cottage in the Radnorshire village, in which he had lived for three years in comfort and refinement upon a very small income, which he had inherited from his mother. He was an only child, the last, as he supposed, of a race that had slowly exhausted itself; a race of gentlefolks who had neither toiled nor spun, and who had done very little to distinguish themselves in the busy places of this world. They were a Cheshire family, and they had lived on their own land and had seen their importance

and their means gradually decaying, from generation to generation, without being moved to any strong stand-up fight against adverse fortune. Some of them had been soldiers, and some of them had been students, not undistinguished in the records of the University; but the active temper which can redeem the fortunes of a race had been unknown in the house of Arden.

Ambrose fled from Radnorshire with a great horror of the soil on which he left the grave of his dead wife. He had been very fond of her, not with a passionate or romantic attachment, but with a mild and in some wise fatherly affection, appreciating the sweetness of a most perfect character. She had never been more to him than a dear and tenderly loved friend; and his affection at the beginning of their married life had been as placid, temperate, and serious as the love of grey-haired Darby for grey-haired Joan after their golden wedding. It did not seem within the capacities of the student's nature to care passionately for anything outside the world of thought.

He went to London and lived in a lodging near the British Museum for about half a year, while his infant son was cared for by a little stay-maker at Roehampton, who had about half a rood of garden-ground behind her cottage. The boy throve well enough in this humble home, and Ambrose used to walk to Roehampton every Sunday to look at him. All his weekdays he spent in the Reading-room of the Museum.

One day he discovered that his boy had grown very fond of him. He cried and clung to his father at parting; and then it first entered into his father's mind that he might make a home for his son, and for his books, which had accumulated rapidly since he had lived in London, the temptations of the second-hand bookshops being irresistible to a man for whom the world of books was almost the only world.

The valley of the Thames was fairer and more familiar to the Oxonian than any other part of England. It was also within reach of the great Reading-room; so it was on the banks of the Thames that Ambrose Arden looked for a home. He found a cottage and a good old garden for thirty pounds a year, and, as his prowlings about the lamplit streets within a one-mile radius of the Museum had made him familiar with a great many brokers' shops, he had no difficulty in getting together the few articles of furniture necessary for the establishment of a widower with an infant son. A carpenter from Henley put up pitchpine shelves for the student's existing

library, and provided space for future purchases, and with his books and his son Ambrose Arden settled down to that dreamy life which he had now been leading for between eleven and twelve years.

The Hatrells made their neighbour's acquaintance casually one summer evening on the river, where the student was sitting in a punt with his boy, the father absorbed in a book, the boy fishing, moored to the willowy bank, and where Robert Hatrell was sculling his wife slowly towards the sunset, in his capacious skiff, the strong rhythmical stroke bearing witness to the time when he was one of the best oars in the University eight. The casual acquaintance soon ripened into an easy and familiar intercourse, and with the passing years intimacy became friendship. The two men had been at Oxford together, albeit they had no memory of having ever met there. They had some tastes in common, although one was all energy, the other all repose. Mrs. Hatrell was a voracious reader, and looked to Mr. Arden for counsel and help in the choice of books. By the new lights afforded by his wide knowledge of the best authors, she found many a pleasant short cut to a higher level of thought and culture than governess or professors had revealed to her. She grew to depend upon him for intellectual guidance; and it was with delight she accepted his offer to educate her only child after his own plan.

"It seems almost absurd to see you wasting your time upon that child," she said, feeling some compunction at the beginning of things.

"I have plenty of time to waste, and Daisy's education will serve as amusement and relaxation for me. Now that Cyril is at Winchester I have no young thing to lighten my life except Daisy."

"But to see you teaching a child of seven seems rather like setting a Nasmyth hammer to crack a nut."

"One of the boasted merits of the Nasmyth hammer is that it *can* crack a nut. Let me think that I have not lost the lightness and delicacy of a mind which can understand the workings of a child's brain.

The mother submitted, and was grateful; and it gradually became a familiar thing to see Ambrose Arden, the grave student of seven and thirty, whose *magnum opus* was to make a revolution in the history of philosophy, bending over the brown-eyed child, and teaching her history upon his own plan, which was to begin in the valley of the Euphrates, and travel gradually downward through the ages, from the dim fairy-land of the East to the finished civiliza-

tion of modern Europe. He had a genius for simplification, and contrived to make the broad outlines of ancient history clear and interesting even to that infant mind. He had travelled over all the same ground with his boy, Cyril, who was now distinguishing himself at Winchester, whence he came nearly every saint's day to see his father.

CHAPTER II.

CONFIDENCES.

THE moon rose at nine o'clock that evening, and Robert Hatrell sauntered into the garden after dinner to smoke and meditate upon the projected improvements. With him action was everything, and reverie, however pleasant, rarely lasted long. To-night the meditative mood lasted no longer than a single cigarette. That finished he opened a little gate in the kitchen garden, and strolled across the road. Another little gate admitted him into his neighbour's garden, and he went straight to the open window of the roomy parlour which Ambrose had converted into a study, by the simple process of lining it from floor to ceiling with books. An old knee-hole desk occupied the centre of the floor, and three chairs and an old-fashioned sofa completed the sum of the furniture. It looked a snug and congenial room for a student, shabby as it was, in the light of the shaded lamp by which Ambrose sat reading, unconscious that any one was looking in at him.

"Shut your dusty tome, old book-worm, and come for a stroll in the moonlight," said Hatrell. Whereupon the student rose and obeyed him without a word, like a man of weaker will obeying one of stronger will.

A cigarette was offered and taken, and then the two men walked along the road in silence, broken only by a common-place remark or two about the weather and the night, until Robert Hatrell said abruptly—

"Are you sure it was the same man?"

"The man you have described to me? Assuredly it was. What other man should know your story?"

"No, perhaps not. I doubt if there is any one else who would know."

"The whole matter is easy enough to understand. This man is one of many, all on the verge of starvation, refugees of the Com-

mune, who have been dragging out a miserable existence in London since last May—nearly a year. I, who am a Republican and a Nihilist in theory, have sympathies with these men who have tried to reduce theory to practice. So I whipped up a few pounds, your fiver among others, and took the money to a public-house in Greek Street where my friends assemble of an evening, and distributed it among them, in accordance with their necessities. While telling these poor wretches the source of the money I happened to mention your name, and the man followed me into the street afterwards and questioned me about you. I naturally refused to answer questions which I considered impertinent, and then he told me his story."

"And of course made the worst of it?"

"He told it in a vindictive spirit."

"And you think, perhaps, that I ought to have acted differently—that Claude Morel, the chemist's assistant, ought at this moment to be my brother-in-law?"

"My dear Hatrell, a man's relations with women are just the one part of his life which no other man has the right to question, and in which counsel and opinion are worse than useless."

"That's no answer," exclaimed Hatrell, impatiently. "Why don't you say at once that I ought to have married a milliner's apprentice and had that man for my brother-in-law?"

"He would not have been a very agreeable connection, I admit, in practice, although in theory all men are equal. There are plenty of men of as low a grade socially whom I would accept as my friend and equal to-morrow—but not Claude Morel. The fellow bears the brand of Cain upon his forehead. It was men of his stamp who made the Commune what it was. He was one of their speakers, the intellectual element, the force that set other men's brains on fire. I was sorry to see great hulking, honest fellows under his influence. I could read the history of last year's riot and murder in that little room in Soho. A very dangerous man, your Claude Morel."

"Yet you think he ought to have been my brother-in-law," said Hatrell, slashing at the flowery bank with his stick, harping irritably on the question.

"No, no, no! Since you were not so far entangled with the sister as to——"

"But I was entangled. I loved her, man. Yes, I was over head and ears in love with that milliner's apprentice; and had more than half a mind to fling prudence to the winds and marry her. She

was very young, very confiding, and altogether innocent. Yes, a grisette in Paris, and innocent. God knows how long that would last. She had left her native village less than a year before I met her; had travelled to Paris to find her brother, who had apprenticed her to a milliner in the Rue Neuve des Petits Champs. We met by purest accident in a street crowd; she hustled and frightened in the mob. I happened to protect her. I walked home with her, ever so far—beyond the Bastille—and so began an acquaintance which might have ended—God knows how—if that young man had not tried to force the running. I have to thank his violence, not my prudence, for my escape, and for my sweet English wife. I shudder to think of the difference such a marriage as that must have made in my life."

"That depends upon the strength of your love," said Arden. "I can imagine a man loving so decply and truly as never to regret having married beneath him."

"No, Arden; repentance must come. It is the after-taste of passion; and a gentleman's love for a peasant girl can be only passion at best."

"That depends upon the gentleman."

"Ah, you are in your provoking mood to-night, I see. Did this fellow tell you what has become of his sister—whether she is dead or living?"

"No, he went into no particulars, nor did I encourage him by asking questions. He talked of broken promises, broken hearts, a blighted life, pride, and cruelty—talked as you may suppose a Communist, nurtured upon Le Père Duchesne, would talk of an English gentleman who had, in his idea, compromised and disappointed his sister. I cut him as short as I possibly could, only I considered it my duty to let you know that the man is in London, and that he threatens to hunt you out and revenge his sister's wrongs—her supposed wrongs, we will say—in some way or other."

"That means lying in wait for me at the corner of a London street to shoot me, or to throw vitriol in my face, I suppose," said Hatrell, with a scornful laugh. "I must take my chance of the bullet or the vitriol."

"It may be only an empty threat; but I own I don't like the man's physiognomy or his history, and I recommend you to be on your guard. It might be wise to try and get him out of the country. I dare say he would emigrate to one of the colonies if emigration were made profitable to him."

"Arden, do you think I am such a poltroon as to buy my life from a foreign bully? He threatened me in Paris, and I turned him out of my room neck and crop. He wanted to frighten me into a marriage with his sister by pretending to believe that I was her seducer. But that was not the worst. When I told him that marriage was impossible he insinuated that there might be other arrangements. A wealthy Englishman in love with a girl of inferior station might make such a settlement as would ensure the comfort and respectability of her future life, without the legal tie. In a word, the man was, and is, a scoundrel. He knew that I was rich, and he wanted to make a market out of me. Don't you know that *chantage* is a profession in Paris; a profession to which a lazy scoundrel looks as the one royal road to competence? And he found that I was not a singing bird. Whatever debt I owed to my little Toinette, it was not one that he could force me to pay. And do you suppose that now, fourteen years after, I would reward his bluster with the concession of so much as a sixpence? If you do think so poorly of me, Arden, you must be a very bad judge of human nature."

"Perhaps I am wrong, but I have your wife to think of as well as you. What if this man were to come here and tell his story——"

"To my wife? Let him. She will believe no man's word against mine. Indeed I have talked to her about Antoinette; or at least I have told her, half in sport and half in earnest, that I was once in love with a grisette: and I am not afraid to tell her the whole truth, that in my salad days, two years before I saw her fair young face, I was very hard hit by that same grisette, and trifled with her longer than I ought, and had even half a mind to marry her, and only pulled myself up sharp when her brute of a brother interfered. I need not tell her that I sent the girl a hundred pounds in my farewell letter, and wished her a good husband in her own rank of life, who would respect her all the more for that dot, and for the knowledge that I could sign myself in all sincerity and honour her faithful friend. Ah, Ambrose Arden, you who have given your heart to books can never imagine how this foolish heart of mine ached as I wrote that letter."

"I own that I have lived more among books than among human beings; yet I can conceive the possibility of an overmastering love bearing down all barriers, weighing caste and circumstance as feathers in the scale against passion. But what I cannot conceive is that such intense feeling can be transient, that such a love can ever give place to another."

"Ah, but you see I do not pretend that my fancy for Antoinette was ever a *grande passion*. My heart ached at throwing her off, but the heartache came as much from my sympathy with her in her disappointment as from my own sense of loss. I was never really in love till I met Clara."

"She accepted your hundred pounds, I suppose?"

"I hope so. It never came back to me; but as I received no acknowledgment from my poor little friend it is likely enough her brother intercepted my money and her letter, counselled her to refuse the gift indignantly perhaps, and then put my bank-notes in his pocket. I believe this fellow to be capable of anything sneaking and infamous."

"And you never heard of Antoinette after that letter?"

"Never. I left Paris the next day. The city seemed dull and dark without the light of those southern eyes. It was in autumn, the dead season, and I went off to Petersburg, and thence to Odessa to look at my father's work there, and to feel sorry I was not as good a man as he. The air has turned chilly. Will you come in and play a rubber?"

"With pleasure."

They turned and went back to River Lawn. They went in by the hall door into that roomy, low-ceiled hall which had formed the greater part of the basement of the original cottage, and which was a triumph of engineering skill on Mr. Hatrell's part. Ponderous cherry-wood beams supported the ceiling, which was further sustained by two oak pillars carved in a bold and vigorous style of art, which looked as if it had been executed under the Heptarchy. A procession of short-nosed Druids and Saxon kings, with Boadicea in her chariot leading the way, encircled those stunted pillars in a diagonal line, and many an erudite person had expatiated upon their antique preciousness until silenced by Robert Hatrell's uproarious laughter.

To-night in the shine of the lamps the hall glowed with the vivid hues of Italian stripes and Persian embroidery, and through the open door the large airy drawing-room revealed its more delicate colouring and cool sea-green draperies. Mother and daughter were sitting at a small round table, with the light of a reading-lamp concentrated upon their bright eager faces, as they arranged the pieces of a large puzzle map, the child intensely eager to forestal her mother.

"Oh, mother, you've put India next to Russia—one so hot and the other so cold. That can't be right," cried Daisy.

The round Chippendale card-table was set ready at a respectful distance from the fire. Two shaded lamps shed their mild radiance upon the cards and the markers. The rubber was a nightly institution, and there were few evenings upon which Ambrose Arden did not come in to take his part in the game, he and Mrs. Hatrell playing against the master of the house, who liked no partner at whist so well as dummy. Clara and her partner were in perfect sympathy in their dislike of cards, and therefore they both played an unimpassioned, ineffectual, and often inattentive game, which left Robert Hatrell master of the situation. He played with a fervour and vigour which would have carried a Bill through the House, or silenced an enemy's fort; and he enjoyed the eager, rapid hour's play with an enjoyment which was exhilarating to his companions; and then, the hour having ended in his triumph, and the complete humiliation of his opponents, he would rise from the table, exultant and beaming, and pace up and down the room, talking as few men can talk, with a rush of eloquence even about small things.

When the three players had taken their seats Daisy came to say good night, having stayed up till half-past nine—a prodigious indulgence.

She kissed her mother and father, and then went to Mr. Arden, and put her arms round his neck and kissed him almost as fondly as she had kissed the other two. He detained her for a minute or so while Hatrell was dealing for the always favoured dummy.

"Shall we have the imperfect tense to-morrow, Daisy?"

"Yes, I nearly know it now. I shall quite know it to-morrow."

"And to-morrow will be to-day; and even these kisses of yours will be in the imperfect tense—won't they, pet?—things that have been. God bless mother's treasure. Good night!"

He said the words almost reverently, with a touch of deeper feeling than is usually given to fatherly good nights. Robert Hatrell had not even looked up from the cards when his child kissed him.

It was a pretty domestic picture in the cheerful light of lamps and fire—the three figures at the table, so calm, so reposeful, with such passionless countenances, the child's vivid face moving amidst them, looking with rapid glances from one to the other. Family affection, unclouded peace, unquestioning love, could hardly be more perfectly expressed than they were that night in Robert Hatrell's drawing-room.

CHAPTER III.

BEFORE THE CORONER.

In the *Evening Standard* of Wednesday, July 7, 1872, appeared the following:—

Mysterious Disappearance.—Much anxiety is being felt by the family and friends of Mr. Robert Hatrell, of River Lawn, Lamford, near Henley, who has been missing since last Monday afternoon. He left the Union Bank, Cockspur Street, at three o'clock on that day, in company with a friend, intending to walk to Lincoln's Inn Fields; but he was accosted in Cranbourne Street by a middle-aged woman of genteel appearance, whom he accompanied in the direction of Greek Street, after taking leave of his friend. He had in his possession a parcel of Bank of England notes to the amount of some thousands, and it is greatly feared that he has been made away with on account of this money. The police have been on the alert since yesterday morning, but up to a late hour last night no discovery had been made.

The following notice appeared in the *Times* on July 8:—

Dreadful Murder in Denmark Street, Bloomsbury.—The mystery of Mr. Hatrell's disappearance has been solved, and the worst fears of his family and friends are realized. On the 30th ult., a foreigner, of respectable appearance, representing himself as a journeyman watchmaker, employed at Mr. Walker's, Cornhill, took a second-floor back bedroom at No. 49, Denmark Street, paying a week's rent in advance. He appeared to be a person of orderly and sober habits. He was out of doors all day, and he went in and out morning and evening without attracting any notice from his fellow-lodgers. He waited upon himself, and always locked his door before going out. There was therefore no curiosity excited by the fact that his room remained closed during the whole of last Tuesday, and although no one had seen the lodger in question, it was supposed that he had gone out at the usual hour in the morning and had let himself in at the usual hour in the evening. The house is in the occupation of three different families—the first floor being occupied by a working tailor, and the front room used as a workshop for three or four men. The foreigner, who gave the name of Saqui, and represented himself as a French Swiss, from the depart-

ment of the Jura, had been accommodated with a latch key. It was only at six o'clock yesterday morning, when the landlady knocked at the door of the second-floor back, with the intention of asking her lodger to leave his room open in order that she might clean it during his absence, that suspicion was first aroused. His hour for leaving the house was supposed to be about seven, and not being able to obtain any reply at six, the woman concluded that he had been out all night, and proceeded to inquire of the other lodgers when he had been last seen, she herself not having seen him since Monday morning—when he passed her in the passage at a quarter-past seven on his way out. No one remembered having seen him or heard any movement in his room since Monday afternoon, when one of the men in the tailor's workshop had seen him pass the open door on his way downstairs. Suspicion being now aroused the door was broken open, and a terrible spectacle met the view of those who entered the room. A man was found lying on the floor, stabbed through the heart. He had been stabbed in the back, and there were three wounds, two out of which were deadly. No weapon has yet been found, but, from the nature of the wounds, it is supposed that they were inflicted by a double-edged knife. The body was surrounded by the bedclothing, which had been stripped off the bed and spread about the murdered man so as to absorb the blood that might otherwise have stained the ceiling below. Death must have been iustautaneous. The deceased was a man whom few antagonists would have cared to attack single-handed. His pockets had been rifled, but his clothing was not disturbed, and identification followed almost immediately upon the tidings of the murder being conveyed to Scotland Yard.

Mr. Hatrell had drawn a considerable sum of money out of the bank, and was on his way to a solicitor's office in Lincoln's Inn Fields, to complete the purchase of an estate, at the time he was decoyed to Denmark Street.

The police are actively engaged in the pursuit of the murderer, and are said to be already in possession of an important clue. A reward of five hundred pounds has been offered by the family of the deceased.

Extracts from the Report of the Inquest, published in the *Times* of the following day, July 9:—

Colonel MacDonald stated that he was an intimate friend of the deceased, and that he had lunched with him at the Army and Navy Club on Monday, the 5th inst. Deceased was in particularly high

spirits during luncheon, being much elated at the prospect of passing into immediate possession of a small estate adjoining his own grounds on the banks of the Thames. The estate was under ten acres, but the situation of the land was exceptional, and the amount to be paid for it was large—close upon four thousand pounds. He, Colonel MacDonald, could not remember the exact sum.

After luncheon he offered to accompany the deceased to the bank, where he was to cash a cheque for the purchase-money, and from the bank—the West End branch of the Union Bank of London, in Cockspur Street—he offered to walk with him to Lincoln's Inn Fields, the deceased being somewhat in advance of the hour named for the interview with the vendor's solicitors. He and the deceased had been at Eton together, and he was, he believed, one of Mr. Hatrell's oldest and most intimate friends. They were in the habit of meeting frequently in London, and he had often visited Mr. Hatrell in his house in Buckinghamshire.

CORONER: Were you with the deceased at the counter of the bank when he cashed his cheque?

COL. MACDONALD: I was standing at his elbow at the time.

Did you observe where he put the notes?

He put them into a Russia leather note-case, which he placed in his breast-pocket. He was wearing a frock coat. I advised him to button his coat, more in jest than in earnest, as I considered the money perfectly safe where he had placed it.

When you left the bank with him, did you observe any suspicious-looking person hanging about upon either side of the street? Had you any reason to suppose that your friend was watched.

Not the slightest. But I do not mean to state as a fact that there was no one lurking about or watching him. The idea of such a probability never entered into my mind. There was nothing out of the common in two men going in and coming out of a bank. The fact of Mr. Hatrell carrying some thousands could only be known to any one from previous information.

Did anything occur on your way to Cranbourne Street to suggest the notion that you were being followed?

Nothing. But if we had been followed the fact would, in all probability, have been unnoticed by either of us. We were engaged in conversation the whole time, and we were passing through a busy part of London. Nothing happened to my knowledge out of the common way until we entered Cranbourne Street, where a middle-aged woman, of respectable appearance, approached my friend and

spoke to him in French. He stopped to answer her, and I drew a little way off while they were talking.

Did you hear much of their conversation?

Very little. I was standing with my back to them, looking into a print shop. I am not much good at the French language, and they were speaking French all the time.

Was it a long conversation?

It seemed longish to me. I was waiting for my friend, and had very little to engage my attention. I don't suppose the conversation really lasted ten minutes.

You must have overheard something. You know some French, I suppose?

I overheard enough to know that the woman was talking of some person who was very ill, in a dying state, as I understood, and who wanted to see Hatrell. The woman seemed to be pleading for this dying person. I heard the name Antoinette repeated two or three times in the course of the conversation. Hatrell walked a few paces further with me after this, leaving the Frenchwoman waiting for him. He told me that he felt himself obliged to go with this woman to see some one—an old acquaintance. The visit would be a matter of less than an hour, as the house was not far off; and in the meantime he wanted me to go on to the solicitors in Lincoln's Inn Fields, to explain his unavoidable delay, and to assure them that he would be with them half an hour after the appointment, which was for four o'clock. "I shall take a hansom as soon as I have—seen this person," he said. "It is an urgent case—sickness—destitution." I reminded him of the large sum of money on his person, and asked him if the woman was known to him. He told me that she was—indirectly. She was nearly related to the person he was going to see, who was an old acquaintance. "You don't suppose I'm going to be decoyed and murdered?" he said, laughing; and, upon my word, with his magnificent physique and perfect vigour of health and manhood, he seemed about the last man whom any one would try to decoy, in the heart of London and in broad daylight. The idea seemed as preposterous to me as it did to him. He told me I could carry the money to the solicitors myself if I liked, an offer which I laughingly declined; and so he left me, never to be seen by these eyes again, as a living man. The witness was here deeply affected, and the coroner paused for some moments before continuing the examination.

Did you see the direction in which the deceased and his companion went away?

Yes. I turned to watch them. They went into Cranbourne Alley.

That was the last you saw of them?

Yes. There was one thing which I observed on my way towards St. Martin's Lane which, it has since occurred to me, might have some bearing upon my poor friend's fate. As I passed a small Italian coffee-house a few doors from the spot at which Hatrell and I parted, I noticed a man standing in the doorway, looking down the street in the direction of Cranbourne Alley, and it seemed to me, on after consideration, that he was standing there for a purpose, on the watch for something or some one in the street. He had a more intent look than a casual idler would have had. I crossed the road almost immediately after I observed this man, and I loitered a little on my way to St. Martin's Lane, looking at one or two shops. As I waited at the corner with my face towards Long Acre, a hansom passed close by me, and I recognized the man being driven in it as the same man I had seen at the door of the café.

Should you know the man if you were to see him again?

I'm afraid not. It was the expression of his face that struck me —not the face itself. He had a keen, eager look, like a man in a desperate hurry. The cabman was driving very fast, the wheel almost grazed me as the cab shot round the corner.

In what direction was the cab going?

Towards St. Giles's Church.

That would be in the direction of Denmark Street, would it not?

Yes. It is the way to Denmark Street. I walked over the ground this morning.

The witness appeared deeply affected, but gave his evidence in a straightforward and business-like manner.

You had known the deceased from boyhood, you say. Did you know anything in the history of his life calculated to throw any light upon his conduct in so readily accompanying this foreign woman to Denmark Street?

Nothing.

You had never heard of his having relations with a person called Antoinette?

No. I never heard of any one by that name. But I have heard him speak of a girl in Paris with whom he was in love two or three years before his marriage.

Do you suppose that there was an intrigue between him and that girl?

I think not. He spoke of her quite frankly, and on one occasion in the presence of his wife, to whom he was most devoted. I remember that upon that occasion his romantic passion for the Frenchwoman was joked about by husband and wife. I do not for a moment believe in any dishonourable connection in his past life.

But you think that Antoinette may have been the name of the girl he admired?

I think it very likely.

And that the name was used as a lure to get him to the house in Denmark Street?

I have no doubt that it was so.

When did you first hear of his disappearance?

Early the following day, when I received a telegram from his wife, asking for information about him. Mrs. Hatrell knew that her husband was to lunch with me on Monday, and naturally applied to me when first she took alarm.

A member of the firm of solicitors in Lincoln's Inn Fields gave evidence as to the appointment made by the deceased for the payment of the purchase-money, £3,865, and the execution of the conveyance. This witness described the arrival of Colonel MacDonald with the message from the deceased, and the surprise that was felt at Mr. Hatrell's non-arrival, it being known to the firm that he was a man of punctual and business-like habits, and particularly anxious to pass into possession of the property in question.

The Bank clerk who cashed Mr. Hatrell's cheque, deposed to the amounts and numbers of the notes, and stated that the police were already in possession of these numbers, and on the alert to discover any attempt that might be made to dispose of the notes either in England or on the Continent.

Mrs. Moore, the landlady of the house in Denmark Street, described the appearance and characteristics of the foreigner who engaged her second-floor back bedroom on the Thursday preceding the murder.

He was a very civil-spoken man. He looked quite the gentleman. He spoke English like a foreigner, and I believe he was a Frenchman. His way of talk was quite different from a German gentleman, in the tailoring, who occupies my first floor. I should certainly have put him down as a Frenchman, and he told he was a

French Swiss, from the neighbourhood of Neuchatel, and that he worked for Mr. Walker, of Cornhill. I couldn't have wished for a more respectable lodger. He offered me a week's rent in advance, as he was a stranger, and I did not hesitate about taking him.

There was nothing repulsive or disreputable in his appearance—nothing that set you against him?

Nothing. He told me that he should want no attendance, as he was used to waiting upon himself. If he wanted a cup of tea he would take the teapot down to my back kitchen—I don't burn any fire in the front room in summer time—and would boil up my kettle. All he would want would be for me to clean his room once or twice a week.

Did he bring any luggage?

Only one small portmanteau. The police have taken that away. It was opened in my presence, and there was nothing in it except an old pair of trousers, a brush and comb, and a few foreign books and newspapers.

Were you at home on the day of the murder?

Yes, I was indoors all that day.

Yet you did not see or hear the deceased come into the house?

I was in my back kitchen most of the day doing my weekly wash.

Could you not hear people go in or out of the street-door when you were in the back kitchen?

Yes, I could hear them going along the passage and upstairs, but I wasn't likely to take notice of who went out or came in. The men from the tailor's workshop used to go in and out and up and down at all hours. There are other lodgers in the attics, and an old lady and gentleman in the parlours. I might have noticed a stranger's step, perhaps, if I had been on the listen, for I knew the footsteps of most of the lodgers; but I was very busy with my wash, and I didn't take much notice.

What was the state of the room when you and Mr. Schmidt broke open the door?

The deceased was lying on his face, stabbed through the back. The bed curtain was drawn. A counterpane and blanket had been dragged off the bed and placed round the deceased so as to sop up the blood.

Was there anything to indicate that the murderer's clothes or hands were bloody when he left the room—any smears upon the door, or traces of bloody footprints on the floor?

There wasn't a sign of anything of that kind, but there was bloodstained water in the wash-basin, and a towel stained with blood on the washstand. The police examined the room.

Should you know your lodger if you were to see him again?

I could swear to him anywhere.

John Smallman, journeyman tailor, deposed to having seen the Frenchman go downstairs some time on Monday afternoon. He took notice of the fact, as on Friday and Saturday the man had been out all day, and was supposed to be in constant employment in the watch-making trade. He laughed and told one of his mates that the Frenchman had been keeping St. Monday. He could not say the precise time at which he had seen the man pass the landing, but knew that it was some time after four, and that the church clock hard by had not struck five. He generally went out for his tea when St. Giles's Church clock struck five.

Did you notice anything peculiar about the appearance of the man as he passed the landing?

No. He walked with a bit of a swagger, and he was whistling softly to himself as he went downstairs. He was whistling that tune French people are so uncommon fond of.

The Marseillaise, perhaps, you mean?

No. It was the other tune—Young Dunoy.

Partant pour la Syrie?

Yes, that was it.

Had you or any of your mates struck up an intimacy with this Frenchman—had you got into conversation with him upon any occasion?

Not us. He was a very close party, and seemed to think himself a good bit above the rest of the lodgers. He'd only been in the house a few days before the murder.

Did none of you see him after that Monday afternoon?

None of us. I don't believe he ever entered the house after he left it that time.

A cabman, who had come forward of his own accord, deposed to having driven a man from Cranbourne Street to the corner of Denmark Street about half-past three o'clock on the afternoon of the murder. The man hailed him from the pavement in front of an Italian coffee-shop. He told him to drive as fast as he could go, and he should have double fare. He did drive fast, getting over

the distance in about five miuutes, and the man gave him a florin. He got out at the cornor of the street nearest the church. Wituess stopped to see where he went, and he saw him enter a house on the right-hand side of the street, which he had since identified as the house where the murder was committed. Witness believed that he would be able to recognize the man iu question. He was a dark-complexioned man, betweon thirty and forty, rather a good-looking man, and he lookod like a foreigner—French or Italian, most likely Italian.

The medical evidence indicated that two out of the three wounds had pierced the heart and that death must have been almost instantaneous. The deceasod was a very powerful man, heart and lungs souud as a bell. Such a man could not have been attacked singlc-handed, unless taken completely off his guard.

There were other witnesses examined, and the inquest was adjourned for a week, the usual order being given for the burial of the dceased in accordance with the desire of his friends.

The adjourned inquiry evolvcd very little additional information. Much of the original evidence was repeated, but no new facts had beeu discovered relative to the murderor, except Mr. Walker's repudiation of any knowledge of such a man's existonce. No man of that name had ever been employed in Mr. Walker's workshops in Cornhill. The police had up to this time totally failed in their efforts to trace either the missing man, or the missing notes. The murder not having been discovered until a day and a half after it had been done, the murderer had had ample time to cross the Channel before the police were on his track. He would probably endeavour to dispose of the notcs in Holland or in Germany, and perhaps leave Hamburg or Bremen for America. The London police were in communication with their brotherhood on the Continent, and all suspicious departures from Havre, Marscilles, Antwerp, Hamburg, Bremen, or any of the principal ports would be notcd. The large reward which had been offered by the widow of the deceased was calculated to stimulate the energies of Scotland Yard; but the efforts of Scotland Yard resulted only in the following up of various false scents, all alike leading to disappointment and disgust.

The one scent which, if it could have been followed while it was warm, should have led to the apprehension of the murderer, was a

lost scent, because the lapse of time had made it cold before the Scotland Yard pack could be laid on.

Ten days after the murder there came communications from the Crédit Lyonnais at Nice, from the Crédit Lyonnais at Cannes, and from Mr. Smith's bank at Monte Carlo, which disposed of the question as to what had become of the money which should have been paid for young Squire Florestan's river-meadows, the bundle of notes which Robert Hatrell had pocketed so gaily that summer afternoon after his cheery luncheon at the Army and Navy Club.

In the morning of July 7 an elderly woman had called at the Crédit Lyonnais at Cannes to exchange two notes of £500 each for French money. She was a person of ladylike appearance and manners, spoke French with a Parisian accent, and impressed the cashier as a personage to whom the utmost respect was due. She was very particular in exacting the fullest rate of exchange for her thousand pounds, and seemed to take a miserly delight in the trifling profit made on the transaction. She informed the cashier, *en passant*, that she had hired a villa in the Quartier de Californie, and that she required the greater part of this money to pay half the season's rent in advance. She added also, *en passant*, that the people of Cannes were usurious in their insistance upon payment beforehand from a tenant whose integrity and whose means it was impossible to doubt. This was said with an air of quiet dignity which confirmed the cashier in his idea that he was dealing with a "personage."

These details were communicated later in confidential talk with the detective who followed up the clue; the main fact telegraphed to Scotland Yard was the fact that such and such notes had been turned into French money.

From Monte Carlo came an account of a larger transaction. An elderly lady of aristocratic appearance had called at the English Bank there late on the afternoon of July 7, and had changed three Bank of England notes for £500 each, taking in exchange French notes, twenty franc pieces, and those large gold pieces of a hundred francs, which make so fine a display in a rouleau on a *trente et quarante* table. Here, as at Cannes, the cashier had been impressed by the lady's distinction of manner and perfect *savoir faire*. The easy way in which she handled a five hundred pound note indicated long experience of wealth. A gambler evidently, thought the cashier, but a woman rich enough to afford to gamble without any

sordid anxiety as to the result; a person whose presence did honour to the delightful little settlement on the rock.

From Nice came a third telegram. Elderly woman exchanged two notes, such and such numbers as advertised, for £500 each, and one, also number as advertised, for £250, on July 8, at 11 o'clock a.m., at the Crédit Lyonnais.

A letter following the above telegram informed the authorities of Scotland Yard that the elderly woman in question was of distinguished appearance, speaking French perfectly, and supposed by the cashier to be a Frenchwoman. She had alleged as her reason for changing the notes that she had bought a plot of land at Beaulieu, with the intention of building a villa there, and she preferred to pay for it in French money. The owner of the land, she added, was an ignorant man, who seemed never to hvae seen a Bank of England note; and there was also the advantage upon the exchange. Again, as at Cannes, the distinguished elderly lady showed herself eager for the utmost profit upon the exchange.

The money taken from the murdered man was thus accounted for—within a hundred and fifteen pounds. The odd money being in smaller notes might easily be disposed of without leaving any trace in the memory of the people who received it. There could be very little doubt that the elderly lady of Cannes was identical with the elderly lady of Nice and Monte Carlo. Her description as given by the three cashiers tallied in every particular, especially in the trifling detail of a rather noticeable mole just above the outer corner of the left eyebrow, and in another detail as to the lady's hands, which were remarkable for their whiteness and delicacy of form—hands which had gone a long way towards suggesting the idea of the lady's patrician birth and refined breeding to the minds of the three cashiers.

One of the cleverest detectives in London charged himself with the task of following the trail of this nameless lady, taking up the thread at Nice after a quarter-past eleven upon the 8th July, which was the time of her latest recorded appearance.

It needed a good deal of close work in the way of inquiry at nearly every hotel in the city to discover that an elderly Frenchwoman of good appearance spent the night of July 7th at the Hotel des Princes, that she arrived by the late train from Monte Carlo, that her only luggage consisted of a hand-bag, neither large nor heavy, that she went out soon after ten o'clock on the morning of

the 8th, lunched in her own room at twelve, and left the hotel at half-past twelve in a cab, which was called for her at the door, carrying her bag with her, after duly paying her bill. Neither porter nor waiter had observed the number of the cab, nor had any one heard her direction to the driver. It was supposed she was going to the railway station, and the hour at which she left suggested that she was going in the Rapide which leaves Ventimille at six minutes past eleven for Paris. As the aforesaid Rapide stops at nearly every station between Nice and Marseilles the lady's range of country—as to choice of where she should alight—would be wide; but the local idea was that any person so ill-advised as to leave Nice was hardly likely to stop till he or she came to Paris. Between Nice and Paris there was practically nothing—a monotonous progression of orange orchards, sea-shore, and wooded hills; an insignificant watering-place or two—Cannes, St. Raphael—a shipbuilding settlement—and a seaport; but for pleasure, for gaiety, for movement, for the lovers of opera, playhouse, and little horses, absolutely nothing.

The intelligent detective visited Monte Carlo and saw the cashier at Mr. Smith's Bank. He went into the rooms and talked to the attendants. He met an acquaintance or two, also bent on business; but he could find out nothing more about the elderly lady.

He went to Cannes, and put the Cannes cashier through a kind of Socratic dialogue in the way of close questioning, but could get no more than had been already told. A house-to-house visitation of the hotels resulted in the discovery that an elderly Frenchwoman, travelling alone, had descended at the Hotel de France at half-past seven o'clock in the morning of the 7th, arriving doubtless by the train which leaves Marseilles an hour after midnight. She had breakfasted alone in her room, had gone out before eleven, had lunched and paid her bill, and left the hotel in a cab a little before two o'clock in the afternoon.

There was nothing to show where the woman had gone when she left Nice. Inquiries at the station there had been without result of any kind. Whether she had set her face towards the Italian frontier—or whether she had gone by Marseilles to Paris, or had stopped at Marseilles, or had turned westward and crept by slow trains down to Biarritz or Bordeaux—there was no power could help the intelligent gentleman from Scotland Yard to discover. She was gone. From her appearance at the Hotel de France at Cannes to her disappearance from the Hotel des Princes at Nice she had

been alone. Of whomsoever she might be the accomplice, she had been trusted to carry out her mission uncontrolled and unwatched.

"The bond between her and the murderer must be very tight," mused the detective, "or he would never trust her with the whole of his plunder. It's my belief that she has gone to Paris, and that he was to meet her in Paris; but how to look for a man of whose antecedents I know nothing, and of whose appearance I know only the vague impressions of three or four people who all describe him differently, is a problem beyond my capacity."

He thought it worth his while, nevertheless, to spend the best part of a week in Paris, and in professional circles where, if ingenuity and long experience of criminal ways and windings could have helped him to a clue, he might have obtained one; but no clue was to be found.

All the detective's researches among doubtful characters and the places which they are known to haunt; all his long hours of patient hanging about at railway stations, in cellars where they make music, at bars where they drink mysterious liquors called by eccentric and alarming names, and in this suspected quarter and in that, were but fruitless labour. He could see nothing, and he could hear nothing, of any man answering to the description of the man who had announced himself as a Swiss watchmaker at the Denmark Street lodging-house.

The detective pursued his researches at Havre, but he could obtain no trace of any such person lately embarked on one of the numerous American and other steamers which leave that port. Such a man might have sailed unnoted, as there was nothing distinctive in the description of the murderer to mark him out from the common herd of superior mechanics.

"It's hard lines for a man to let such a chance slip through his fingers," the detective said to himself, "but I don't believe any man will ever grow rich out of the Denmark Street murder. The job was too neatly done, and the people in it were too clever."

CHAPTER IV.

HOW WOULD SHE BEAR IT?

THE public interest in the fate of Robert Hatrell gradually diminished, and finally expired before summer leaves were withered and dead, dying for want of nutriment. The crime in Denmark Street had made a profound sensation, first because the victim was a man of means and position, and above all a man of unblemished character; next, because it was a shock to society in general to discover that a man of undoubted courage and powerful physique could be assassinated in broad daylight, in a decent London street, amidst the going and coming of respectable working people, and that his murderer could escape unchallenged with his plunder.

There were a good many leading articles in the newspapers upon this subject. The Denmark Street mystery was served up to the British Public, which gloats over all such mysteries, with every variety of journalistic sauce; and the British Public were told, as they had been very often told before, that they were living in a corrupt and degenerate age; that such crimes as the Denmark Street murder were the natural outcome of luxurious habits in the upper middle classes, and of unspeakable corruption among the aristocracy, whereby the great city of London had become a hotbed of sin, in which the criminal instincts of the masses grew and gathered strength to destroy. The British Public was informed that a wave of crime was passing over England, and that a savage lust of blood and gold was in the air; and the British Public was furthermore called upon to take warning by these monstrous developments of our nineteenth century civilization, and in a general way to mend its manners.

These voices crying in the wilderness of London life the British Public heard with but a languid interest. The one fact that did interest society, after the natural curiosity as to the why and the how of Robert Hatrell's death, was the fact that London was not altogether a place devoid of danger to human life even in broad daylight, that a man might at any unguarded moment be lured within four walls and stabbed to death. There were those who argued that there must have been some dark page in Mr. Hatrell's history, or he would not so readily have followed an unknown

messenger on the strength of a woman's name. There must have been something in the dead man's relations with the woman called Antoinette, which made it a matter of life and death to him to go wherever she summoned him. Otherwise, bearing in mind that he was on his way to an important business appointment, and that he had four thousand pounds in his breast-pocket, it must needs seem strange that he should be so easily turned aside.

So argued Society, shaking its head sagely at dinner-tables, where men and women's natural interest in the tragedy of human life sometimes gets the better of that Chesterfieldian refinement which would exclude such subjects of conversation from polite assemblies.

Summer was gone, and it was late autumn, and the outside world had forgotten Robert Hatrell—had forgotten him just when his widow was waking from a long, dull dream of agony to the reality of her irreparable loss.

The woods along the valley of the Thames were clothed in russet and gold, and Clieveden's glades were strewn with fallen leaves. The mists of autumn rose in the early evening, pale and phantom-like, along the river-meadows, and the tramp of the horses on the towpath and the ripple of the water against the sides of the barge had a ghostly sound in the obscure greyness, through which boat and horses came slowly, as if moving in secret under the veil of night.

It was a mild and lovely day at the beginning of October when Clara Hatrell left the house for the first time since her husband's funeral on the eleventh of July. She had insisted on following him to his grave in Lamford Churchyard, and she had borne herself with extraordinary fortitude throughout the funeral service, had stood by the grave till the last ceremony had been performed, had seen the wreaths of summer flowers laid on the coffin lid; and then she had gone quietly back to the house where the happiest years of her married life had been spent. She had gone to her room without a word, save one gentle murmur of thanks to the sister who had been at her side on that trying day. Her sister followed her upstairs, heard her lock the door of her room, and after listening outside for some minutes went down to the drawing-room where the clergyman of the parish, the family lawyer, and Ambrose Arden were assembled.

"I don't know what to do about Clara," she said anxiously; "she has locked herself in her room, and I don't feel that it is right to leave her alone. Yet I don't like to force myself upon her.

One eannot tell what to do for the best; it may be better, perhaps, that she should be alone with her grief."

"Mrs. Hatrell is a woman of deep religious feeling," said the priest. "She will not be alone. She has been borne up wonderfully this day. The same Power will be with her in the solitude of her room. It might be well to leave her alone for an hour or so, Mrs. Talbot. After a quiet interval of prayer she will better feel the comfort of your sympathy."

"Yes, I think you are right. I will leave her to herself for a time, poor dear thing!"

Mrs. Talbot was an elder sister, who had married six years before Clara made her *debut* in soeiety. She had married a rising physician who had now risen to the fashionable level, and was one of the most popular doetors at the West End of London. Mrs. Talbot had a nursery and a sehoolroom to look after, and a widely eomprehensive visiting list, beginning with duchesses, and dwindling down to struggling young women in the musieal, literary, and dramatie line. She had an exaeting, albeit a kind and generous husband; and she had so mueh to do and to think about at home that she had not been able to devote any eonsiderable part of her life to her sister's soeiety. She came now in this hour of ealamity as an aet of duty; but she was not altogether in sympathy with the household at River Lawn, had not altogether grasped the full measure of love whieh had ruled between husband and wife, and thus eould not fathom the depth of the widow's sorrow. She had eomforted a good many widows in her time; and her general experienee had been that, however they might distress their friends by the intensity of their grief during the first half of the first year of widowhood, they generally surprised their friends by their rapid reeovery in the second half.

Dr. Talbot was one of the British Publie who opined that there was something more than met the eye of the coroner or the coroner's jury in the relations of his deeeased brother-in-law with the person ealled Antoinette. Questioned searehingly by his wife on the subjeet of his suspieions, he replied that the case was obvious enough to any one who could read between the lines; and with this oeeult phrase Mrs. Talbot was eonstrained to content herself.

There was no family assemblage to whieh Robert Hatrell's will had to be read. He had stood almost alone in the world, without any relation nearer than second cousins. The sceond cousins

expected nothing from him, and had made no sign since his death, except in the way of letters of condolence to the widow.

"My unfortunate client made his will immediately after his marriage—or I should rather say that he executed his will after his marriage—for the will was drawn up at the same time as the marriage settlement," explained Mr. Melladew, the family solicitor. "He leaves the bulk of his estate in trust for his wife for her life, with succession to his children share and share alike. As there is only one child, she will inherit all at her mother's death. The will gives the trustees power to anticipate some portion of the estate, with Mrs. Hatrell's consent, for the marriage settlement of any son or daughter. By a codicil made in the beginning of last year, Mr. Hatrell leaves his house and the land appertaining to it to his wife, absolutely, with power to purchase conterminous land to the amount of ten thousand pounds out of the corpus of the estate."

"He always hankered after Florestan's land, poor fellow," said Mr. Reardon, the Rector. "Strange that he should have met his death on the very day when he was to complete the purchase of the adjoining meadows. The codicil gives Mrs. Hatrell power to make the addition. That is a fortunate circumstance."

"Fortunate," exclaimed the lawyer. "Do you think she will find it in her heart to remain in a place so associated with her husband?"

"I hope she will not leave my parish. There are people who fly from a spot where they have been happy with those who have been taken from them; but there are others who cling to the place where they have loved and been beloved. If I am any judge of character, Mrs. Hatrell belongs to the latter type, and she will remain in the home associated with her husband."

"I believe you are right, Mr. Reardon," said Ambrose Arden, in his calm, leisurely tones, looking up from a volume which he had taken as if mechanically from the table near his elbow. "I believe Mrs. Hatrell's gentle and adhesive nature will find comfort in familiar things—after a time. I should be very sorry if it were otherwise. I should be very sorry to lose so kind a neighbour, and, above all, to lose my dear little friend and pupil, Daisy."

"Poor little Daisy!" sighed the Rector. "What a blessed thing that she is too young to know the extent of her loss, or the manner of her father's death!"

"That she must never know," said Arden, firmly.

Mr. Reardon looked doubtful.

"Do you suppose this terrible story can be hidden from her always?" he asked. "I fear not. She may be kept in ignorance of the truth while she is a child under her mother's eye, but when she advances to girlhood and mixes with other girls—when she goes to school——"

"She will not go to school," interrupted Arden. "Any one would be mad to expose her to the tittle-tattle and folly of a pack of schoolgirls. I wonder you can suggest such a thing, Rector."

"Well, we will say there shall be no school in her case. Though for an only child that means a lonely, self-contained, and not over-healthy girlhood. But the time will come when she must mix with other people, and go about in the world, at home and abroad. Do you think no officious acquaintance will ever be indiscreet enough to talk to her, in pure sympathy, about her father's death—taking it for granted that she knows all that can be known about it?"

"That is a long way to look ahead," said Arden. "I hope she will grow up a light-hearted, happy girl, her mind so well furnished, her memory so full of interesting things, that should the evil you apprehend ever come to pass she may be strong enough to bear the shock. In the mean time I trust that all her friends in this place, from the highest to the lowest, will do their best to keep her in ignorance of everything except the one fact that she has lost a good and affectionate father."

While this conversation was going on in the drawing-room, Mrs. Talbot was strolling about the garden to get rid of time, in accordance with Mr. Reardon's suggestion that it would be well to leave the mourner to herself for an hour or so. The lawn and river, the flowers and shrubs were in the perfection of their summer beauty, clumps of roses, hedges of roses, standard roses, dwarf roses, blush roses, climbing roses, made the glory of the long, narrow lawn, and between the lawn and the river there was a terrace with great green tubs containing orange trees ranged at regular intervals. There was a flight of steps leading to the river at each end of the terrace, and at the western end, with its back to the setting sun, there was a summer-house of classic form, in Portland stone, a summer-house which in Italy would have been marble. At the eastern end of the terrace, and on a lower level, there was a capacious boat-house, containing a couple of outriggers, a punt, and a skiff, and the level roof of this boat-house had been a favourite lounging place of Robert Hatrell and his friends—a place on which to talk and smoke in the summer twilight, as the pleasure-boats went down to Henley.

Mrs. Talbot had seen her husband and the dead man sitting there in close confidential talk on a summer evening after dinner, while she and her sister strolled up and down the terrace, or stopped to feed the white stately swans and their soft grey cygnets. She almost fancied she could hear the mellow sound of Robert Hatrell's laughter as she walked there now. What a joyous, frank, expansive nature! What a happy life! wanting nothing that this world can give of comfort and delight; endowed with strength, intellect, good looks, fortune, perfect health, and a wife who adored him. And he had been stabbed to death in a shabby London lodging by an unknown hand. It was only a fortnight ago that Emily Talbot and her husband had been dining at River Lawn. They had gone down for a single night in the very flush of midsummer, just to smell the roses, just for a few hours' respite from London gaieties and London smoke, as Clara had expressed it in her letter of invitation. There had been only the Rector and Mr. Arden to meet them, the two men now in the drawing-room with the lawyer. They had been a most sociable party, full of talk, Hatrell expatiating upon his plans for the arrangement of the land which was so soon to be his, and in higher spirits than usual.

There had not been a cloud on the horizon; and Mrs. Talbot, who loved Harley Street and all her London pleasures, had for once in her life gone back to town reluctantly.

"It is curious that Robert and Clara can live like hermits in the height of the season," she told her husband. "But really this morning, when we were leaving, I almost envied them their quiet domestic life in that lovely place."

And now the bond that held two lives was broken, and joy was gone like a dream when one awaketh.

Mrs. Talbot was pacing slowly along the terrace, depressed by these thoughts, when a shriek rang out upon the summer air; such a cry of agony as her ears had never heard until that hour. The sound came from the open window of her sister's bedroom, the large bow window, which was one of Robert Hatrell's numerous improvements. She rushed into the house and ran upstairs, but quick as she was Ambrose Arden and the Rector were there before her, and the former was in the act of breaking open the door as she reached the landing.

He had implored Mrs. Hatrell to open the door, and there had been no answer, so he put his shoulder against the panelling and wrenched the door off its hinges.

Clara Hatrell was sitting on the floor in the middle of the room, with a heap of her husband's letters—her lover's letters, for they had all been written before marriage—scattered about her. She sat with her hands clasped upon her knees, her eyes fixed, and staring into vacancy. Her dishevelled hair fell about her shoulders in a wild confusion, as if her hands had been clutching and tearing at it. Emily Talbot knelt down by her and spoke to her, trying to soothe her, gathering up the tangled hair with gentle hands, pressing tenderest kisses upon her burning forehead; but she took no notice, her eyes remained fixed in that sightless gaze, her fingers were still locked together in the same convulsive grasp.

"She does not know me," cried Mrs. Talbot, horrified at that awful look, which made her sister's face like the face of a stranger; "oh, God, she has gone mad!"

* * * * *

For more than six weeks after the funeral Clara Hatrell lived in the darkness of a distraught brain. More than once during that period she hovered on the brink of the grave, and there were dismal hours in which her doctor and her nurses lost all hope. Life and reason were alike in peril, and there was many a night when Ambrose Arden sat in his study, trying to read, but never able to leave off listening for the footfall that might bring him fatal tidings. During this season of fear he rarely went to his bedroom till the sun had risen above the long level meadows towards Henley Bridge, and often the sunrise found him walking in the lane between his cottage and River Lawn. It was the dreariest time of his life since the short, sharp agony of his young wife's fatal illness. He had nothing to distract his mind from the one subject which absorbed him. His little pupil had been carried off by her aunt, and was at Westgate-on-Sea with a bevy of cousins, all older than herself. His son's vacation was being spent with the old grandfather, in Radnorshire. He had planned the visit at the beginning of Mrs. Hatrell's illness. The lad's company would have been irksome to him in this time of fear. He preferred to be alone while he faced the dread possibility of a fatal issue. No one could have helped him to bear his agony, the agony of fear for the life of the woman whom he had loved in patient subjugation—in such perfect mastery of himself as never to have awakened suspicion in those among whom he lived his everyday life—ever since he first looked upon her fair young face.

No one had ever guessed his secret; not the husband, whose

fiery temper would have been quick to kindle into flame, had there been but the lightest cause for jealousy; not the wife, whose purity would have been quick to take alarm at a word or a look; not the friends, who lived in intimate relations with the family. No one had suspected him. Yes, one perhaps had divined his secret. One pair of clear, candid eyes had read his heart. Once, in a moment of expansion, his pupil and playfellow clasped her arms round his neck and murmured in his ear, "I love you, because you love mother."

CHAPTER V.

DAISY'S DIARY SEVEN YEARS AFTER.

CYRIL says he thinks I could write a novel. I have read so many stories, so much poetry, and I am such a fanciful creature. I hope that isn't another way of saying that I am silly and affected. One never quite knows what a University man means. They seem to have a language of their own, made up of cynicism and contempt for other people. Cyril is such a curious young man; he always seems to mean a great deal more than he says. At any rate, he has said ever so many times this summer that I ought to be able to write a novel. How I wish I could! How delightful it must be to invent people and make them alive; to live in their lives and in their adventures; to move all over the world in a beautiful day dream; not dim and confused, and blurred and blotted with absurdities, like the dreams of slumber, but clear and vivid with the light that never was on land or sea!

I only wish Cyril were right; but alas! he is wrong. I have tried ever so many times. I have begun story after story, and have torn up my manuscript after the second or third chapter. My heroine seemed so foolish and so feeble, there was no life in her. She was like those dear dolls I loved so, that never would sit up, not even against the wall, but always flopped over on one side or the other, as if their lovely waxen heads were too heavy for their awkward, sawdust bodies. She was every bit as limp. My hero was better, but I'm rather afraid he was too much like Rochester in "Jane Eyre," where he wasn't the very image of Guy Livingston. What men those were! Guy was nicer—he would have shown off best at a dinner party or a ball. Mr. Rochester comes nearer one's heart. How I could have loved him after he went blind! Happy

Jane—to be so heroic and steadfast, to go out into the cold bleak world and be nearly starved to death, and then to have her own true love after all. That was something like a destiny!

No, I'm afraid I shall never write a novel. There is something wanting. Invention, I suppose. But I am very fond of writing, so I have made up my mind to write my own life. My adventures would hardly fill a chapter—not if I began at my cradle. I never went to a hard and cruel school like Jane Eyre. I never knew what it was to be hungry, except after a long walk; and then it was only a pleasant hunger, tempered with the knowledge that five-o'clock tea and hot buns and brown bread and butter were waiting for me at home. No, I have no vicissitudes to write about, but I can write about those I love, my impressions of people and scenery, and books and animals.

How big a volume I could fill upon one subject alone if I were to write about mother and all her goodness to me, and the happy years I have spent with her for my chief companion! It seems only yesterday that I was a child and she used to play with me at all sorts of games, just as if she were another little girl. I fancied she was enjoying herself just as much as I was. She would play at visiting, and dinners even, than which I cannot imagine anything more wearisome to a grown-up person. To pretend to eat a grand dinner off little wooden dishes, with painted food glued on to them, curious puce-coloured joints and poultry, and pink and green tarts and puddings; and to make conversation and pretend to think everything nice; and to ask for a second help of a wooden leg of mutton. How dreadfully bored she must have been! but she endured it all like a martyr.

We used to play battledore and shuttlecock on the tennis lawn for hours at a stretch. She could run faster than I till a year or two ago. She says now that those battledore contests kept her young. Every one says how young and girlish she looks, more like my elder sister than my mother. Indeed, strangers generally take her to be my sister.

How pretty she is! pretty is too insignificant a word. She is beautiful. I know no one with such a lovely complexion—clear and pale, with a rosy flush that lights up her face suddenly when she is animated. Her large hazel eyes are the loveliest I ever saw. They have so much light in them; and her smile is like summer sunshine.

But I must begin the story of my life in those days when I was

just old enough to understand all that was going on round about me, and to be sorry when those I loved were sorry; and that will bring me only too soon to the saddest part of all my life—the time when my father was taken from us.

Let me try and recall him vividly in this book while I am still able to remember him exactly as he was, so that when I am old and memory grows dim I may find his image here, as one finds a rose in a book, dry and dead, but with its beauty and colour and velvet texture still remaining.

What a splendid looking man he was! not like Guy Livingston or like Edward Fairfax Rochester. There was nothing dark or rugged, or repulsive about my dear father, and, indeed, although one's heart always goes out to a rugged, repulsive man in the pages of a novel, I don't know whether one would take quite so kindly to Brian de Bois Gilbert, or even to Rochester, in real life. My father was like David, of a pleasant countenance, ruddy and fair to see. I can bring his face and figure before me like a vision, when I shut my eyes in the sunshine and fancy him walking across the lawn to meet me, with the blue of the river behind him, as I used to see him so often in the happy days before I went to Harley Street.

He was tall and broad-shouldered, upright, with an easy walk. He took long steps as he came across the grass, swinging his oak stick, the stick he used in his long tramps to Henley or Reading, or across the fields and woods to some out-of-the-way village. He was almost always out of doors in summer—alone, or with mother, oftenest with mother—walking, driving, rowing, playing tennis.

He was not too old for tennis. Yes, there is the bright frank face, and the smiling blue eyes—honest English eyes. His portrait, in the library, and the photograph that hangs beside my bed may help to keep his features clearly in my memory, but it seems to me as if I never could have forgotten him even if there had been no picture of him in existence. It is hardly a question of memory. His face lives in my heart and mind.

He was fond of me. One of my earliest recollections is of lying at the end of a punt among a heap of soft cushions, while my father walked up and down with the long heavy punt pole, and moved the great clumsy boat over the bright blue water, sometimes turning into a quiet backwater, where he would moor his boat, and sit and smoke his pipe in the sunshine, and talk to me in a slow, dreamy way between the puffs of tobacco, or let me talk to him. Oh, how I used to chatter in my little shrill voice! and what questions I

used to ask him, question after question! and how puzzled he used to look sometimes at my everlasting "why," and my everlasting "what!" Why did the sun shine, or why did the river make the boat move, or what were the flowers made of? Dearest father, how patient he was with me. He used to laugh off my questions. He never explained things, or taught me the names of the flowers, like Uncle Ambrose. Our life together was a perpetual holiday. He taught me how to fish for dace and minnows out of the stern of the boat, and I was very happy with him. It all seems like a dream of happiness now as I look back upon it, but it is as fresh in my memory as the most vivid dream from which one has only just awakened.

Sometimes these happy mornings were Sunday mornings, when mother was at church. If Sunday happened to be a very warm day, father would begin to yawn at breakfast time, and would say he did not feel inclined for church, and that he would go on the water with Daisy; and then I used to clap my hands and rush off to get my sun-bonnet, and before mother had time to make any objection we were off to the boathouse to get the pole and the cushions. When the church bells began to ring from the old red brick tower we were gliding ever so far up the river, on the way to our favourite backwater, where father used to sit and read his Sunday papers, while I worried the little happy, dancing fish under the willows.

Silvery darting creatures, swift as light! How glad I am now that I caught so few of them!

Yes, he was very good to me. He used to talk of days when I should be grown up, and when he would take me to parties and balls. "Your mother and I are saving ourselves up for your first season, Daisy," he said; "that's why we are living like hermits."

Yes, he was good, and I loved him dearly; but perhaps I loved Ambrose Arden almost as well, only in another way.

I don't think any little girl of seven was ever so honoured as to have a man of vast learning to teach her to read and write; unless it was some little princess in the days when a man like Fenelon was not thought too good to be tutor to a Dauphin. Uncle Ambrose taught me from the very beginning. It was his whim and fancy to do so. He is a man of such laborious habits that he takes no account of trouble; and in all the years he has laboured at my education I can never remember one impatient word, or even one

impatient movement on his part. I have lost patience often, I, the learner; he, the teacher, never.

I can just remember how I came to call him Uncle Ambrose. I used to call him Mr. Arden—Mister Arden, at least, for it was before I could speak plainly. One day he told me not to call him Mr., it was too formal between him and me. "Call me Ambrose," he said; and then mother looked up from her work and said that would never do. A little girl could not address a man of his years and learning by his Christian name.

"I am not quite so elderly as I seem," he said, laughing; "but if you think Ambrose too familiar, let it be an imaginary uncle, and let her call me Uncle Ambrose. Will that do?"

"Yes," said mother, "that will do very well." So from that time forward he was Uncle Ambrose, and he is Uncle Ambrose to this day, just as kind, and good, and devoted as he was when I was a little girl, with bare arms, short petticoats, and a sun-bonnet. He still occupies himself about my education, although he is a much more distinguished person than when he began the task. He has published three books since then, books of the very highest literary character, which have made him a reputation amongst the learned and the refined in England and on the Continent. Reviewers have written about him in several languages; his success has been undisputed; his name is quoted with Darwin, and Spencer, and Max Müller. In a word he is a famous man. And yet he is content to go drudging on at the task of educating a frivolous girl like me. We are reading Duruy's "Histoire des Grecs" together this summer, and with it we are reading Grote's "Plato" and a selection of the Dialogues, in Jowett's magnificent translation. The little Greek that I know helps me to appreciate the beauty and grace of the English rendering. I should like to kiss the hand that wrote that noble book.

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How suddenly, how awfully that happy life with my father came to an end! I remember that summer morning when he left us soon after breakfast to go to London and complete the purchase of Mr. Florestan's land. We breakfasted in the garden, in an open tent on the lawn, and we were all so happy. Father talked of nothing but the land and the new garden which was to be laid out immediately. The ground had all been laid out already on paper. The plans were in the library on father's writing-table—drawings of terraces and balustrades, vases and statues lightly sketched in with that

beautiful touch which makes almost any house charming before it is built. Everybody had seen the plans, and had talked about them, and argued and advised; and my dear father had talked them all down with his grand ideas of an Italian garden. Uncle Ambrose quoted Lord Bacon's Essay on Gardens. I remembered the very words a year ago when I began to read Bacon. They came back to me like the memory of a dream. I was only a child, but I used to sit and listen to everything that was said, and think and wonder.

Father kissed me at the gate before he got into the T-cart that was to take him to the station. Thank God for that kiss! He looked back at mother and me as he drove away. He looked round at us with his beautiful smile, and called out gaily, "I shall bring the title-deeds home for you to look at."

He had asked mother to meet him at the station in the evening. She was to drive her ponies, and she was to take me with her if she liked. On those long summer days I used to sit up till nine o'clock, and I used to sit with mother and father while they dined. My aunt Talbot protested sometimes against what she called over-indulgence, and said I was being spoilt, and should grow up old-fashioned. I don't know about the spoiling, but perhaps I have grown up old-fashioned. I could not have been mother's companion in all those happy years if I had not been fond of many things that my cousins don't care for.

We went to the station, mother and I, in good time to meet the train that was due at a few minutes before seven. We were there about a quarter of an hour before the train was due; and we walked up and down the long narrow platform in the evening sunlight, talking about father and his enthusiasm about the new garden.

"It was my fancy, in the first instance," said mother; "but your father is so good to me that I have but to express a wish, and he immediately makes it his own. If I were to ask for a roc's egg, like the Princess Badroulbadour, I believe he would start off to Africa to look for one."

I remember laughing at the idea of the egg.

"A roc's egg would be as big as all our house, mother. Wouldn't it be funny if some one sent us one?"

There were very few people at the station, and we walked up and down and talked as merrily as if we had been in our own garden. Presently an electric bell began to ring, and then a porter came out and rang a bell on the platform in front of the little waiting-room, and then the train came slowly in, and mother and I stood looking

at the faces in the carriage windows. There was seldom any delay in finding out father among the arrivals. He was always one of the first to open the door, and always on the alert to see us.

But on this evening we looked for him in vain. Three people got out of the train, and the train went on, and mother and I were left standing on the platform, disappointed and unhappy. The next train to stop at Lamford was not due until ten minutes to nine—too late for dinner, too late for the sunset on the river—a long, long time for us to wait.

"I must drive you home, Daisy," said my mother, "and then I can come back to meet your father."

I tried to persuade her to wait there and let me wait with her—the idea of home and bedtime was distasteful to me. I could see that my mother was vexed and troubled. I clung to her as she moved to leave the station.

"Let us wait for father; I'm not tired; I'm not hungry. Do let us wait for him, and all go home together."

It was a lovely evening; the sun was still bright, the station-master's little garden was full of sweet-scented flowers—roses, clove carnations, and sweet peas.

"There may be a telegram at home," said my mother. "Yes, I have no doubt he has sent me a telegram."

That idea seemed to decide her. She put me into the carriage, and drove home as fast as the ponies could go. I was a little scared at the pace we travelled along the dusty roads and lanes; but we reached home safely, and then came a fresh disappointment. No telegram.

I was sent to bed at half-past eight, and mother went back to the station. I couldn't sleep, but lay listening and waiting in the summer dusk in my room next mother's dressing-room. I got my good nurse Broomfield to leave my door open, and I listened for the return of the carriage.

When I heard the wheels I ran out upon the landing in my nightgown, and stood at the top of the stairs listening, expecting to hear my father's voice directly the door was opened, but I only heard my mother speaking to the butler.

"Your master has not come by the nine o'clock train, Simeon. There is no other train till after midnight. You will have to sit up for him, and to arrange a comfortable supper. He may not have found time to dine in London."

I ran downstairs in my nightgown, bare-footed, and tried to

comfort poor mother, for I could tell by her voice that she was unhappy. She took me in her arms and cried over me, and we went upstairs together, she scolding me a little for leaving my bedroom, but not really angry. I knew that she was hardly thinking about me. I knew that she was miserable about my father.

That was only the beginning of trouble. She was up all night, walking about her own room or going downstairs and out into the garden, and to the gate, to listen for his coming. All night at intervals I heard her going up and down, and the opening and shutting of the heavy hall door. The butler and one of the maids sat up all night. Mother told Simeon she felt sure his master would come home, by road, in the middle of the night even, rather than leave her in suspense. Such a thing as his breaking an appointment with her had never happened before.

It was broad daylight when I cried myself to sleep—so unhappy for mother's sake, so frightened, without knowing why, about my father.

Mother left the house early next morning to go to London with Ambrose Arden. She did not come back for three days, and then my Aunt Emily came with her, and mother was so altered that I hardly knew her. She was dressed in black, and her pale face had a stony look that made me tremble. She scarcely spoke to me or noticed me, but my aunt took me on her lap, and told me that a great sorrow had come upon me.

My father was dead.

I would not believe it for ever so long. I had heard of people dying, but they were old people who had been ill for a long time, or weak little children, and even they had been ill for a good many days and nights before the end came. But my father was well and strong and happy when he sat in the cart waving us good-bye with his whip. My aunt saw that I did not believe or did not understand her; and she told me slowly how my father had died suddenly in London when he was on his way to a lawyer's office to buy Mr. Florestan's land. He was dead within a few hours after he drove away from our gate. I had no father now. Nothing could ever give him back to me upon this earth. If I were to spend all my life in prayers, never to rise up off my knees while I lived, my prayers would not give him to me for five minutes, would not gain me so much as the sound of his dear voice calling me from the lawn.

My aunt took me to London with her that afternoon, and I think

what I felt most in the midst of my sorrow was the thought that mother did not mind parting with me. She hardly looked at me; she put away my arms from her neck almost angrily when I clung to her crying, and entreating her to let me stay with her. Her eyes looked over my head when she said good-bye to me at the door, as if she saw something a long way off, some horrible thing that froze her blood and made her dumb.

I can understand what she felt now, and how in her grief she was hardly conscious of my existence, and that she did not really care whether I went or stayed. I can sympathize with her now. She has told me how she hardly missed me in those days of agony —only awaking sometimes as if out of a dream to wonder that my place was empty. We had been so much together, I running after her everywhere like a lap-dog, she never tired of me, or impatient with me; and yet in that overwhelming sorrow she almost forgot that she had a daughter. She has owned as much to me; and I have never felt wounded or angry that it should have been so with her, since I have been able to understand the nature of such a grief as hers. But at the time I was heartbroken by her coldness.

Aunt Emily took me to London, and gave me over to the nurses and governesses in her house in Harley Street. It is a very large house, the largest in the street, I believe, and it was built for a rich nobleman when Harley Street was new, and there was nothing but fields and country villages to the north—no Regent's Park, no squares and terraces, and never-ending streets as there are now. It is a fine old house, with panelled walls and decorated ceilings, and large rooms at the back; but it seemed, oh! such a dreary house to me after our garden by the river, and our bright, gay rooms.

"Father is dead, and mother doesn't love me any more," I said to myself again and again, as I sobbed myself to sleep in the strange bedroom, where the very curtains of the bed were an agony to me because of their strangeness. I had never been parted from my mother before. Wherever she and my father went they had taken me with them.

My cousins are all older than I, and they had to work very hard under a French and a German governess. Fräulein taught them music and painting; and Mademoiselle taught them French, attended to their wardrobes, with a useful maid under her, superintended their calisthenic exercises and dancing lessons, and was "responsible for their figures." I cannot help putting that phrase

in my book, for I heard my aunt use it very often. Her great desire was that her daughters should be accomplished and elegant in all their attitudes and movements.

"I expect them to be statuesque in repose, and graceful in motion," she said; and it gave her almost a nervous attack when she saw Clementina sitting with her toes turned in, or her feet and ankles twisted into a knot under her chair.

There is no malice in saying that Aunt Emily's idea of education was the very opposite to that of Uncle Ambrose. He taught and trained me to be happy in solitude, as he is, to be good company for myself, and to find new interests every day in books. Aunt Emily wished her daughters to shine in society, to talk French and German, and to play and sing better than any other girls in her circle, and above all to make the very most of their personal advantages. She is very candid in the expression of her ideas, and, makes no secret of her views upon education, so there is no harm in my recording them in this journal, which nobody is ever to read, so I might be as malevolent as I like without injuring anybody.

Mother says that I am very uncharitable sometimes in my ideas and judgments, and that a large-hearted charity is a virtue of age rather than of youth. I know that I am quick to see the weak points in the characters of my friends and acquaintances, and I dare say I am just as blind to my own defects.

It is a lucky thing for Aunt Emily that her five daughters are all good looking, and two of them decidedly handsome. A plain daughter would have been an actual affliction to her. All the ugliness of the family has concentrated itself in her only son, my cousin Horace, a very plain boy. But fortunately he is scientific, and promises to be a shining light in the medical profession; at least that is what his father and mother say of him. He has made a profound study of sanitation, and he can hardly talk to any one five minutes without mentioning sewer gas. He is always altering the lighting or the drainage or the ventilation in Harley Street, and his father complains that his experiments double the rent.

Horace was eighteen when my father died, and while I was at Westgate with my cousins and the two governesses he used to come down on a Saturday and stop till Monday, and I must own to my diary, which is a kind of lion's mouth into which I can drop any accusations I like, that he gave himself great airs to his sisters and the governesses, and was altogether very disagreeable.

Those summer weeks at Westgate were the unhappiest period of

my life. I look back at them now I am grown up and wonder that I ever lived through them. My cousins were kind to me in a condescending way, as was natural from big girls to a little girl, and the governesses were very sorry for me, and tried to comfort me; but there was no comfort for me on the face of the earth without my mother; and night after night I dreamt of my dead father, and woke to the agony of knowing that I should never see his beloved face or hear his dear voice again, except in dreams. I think grown-up people forget how keenly they grieved and suffered when they were children, and that they never quite understand a child's grief. I know that when either of the governesses tried to console me she always made me just a little more miserable than I was before she took me on her lap and talked to me about Heaven and my father.

I heard by accident, as I was not intended to hear it, that my mother was very ill, dangerously ill; and I was so unhappy about her that after entreating again and again with passionate tears to be taken to her, I made up my mind to walk to London and from London to River Lawn. I had looked at the map of England sometimes when my cousins had their atlases out, and I knew that to reach Lamford I must go through London. I lay awake all night thinking of how I was to get away when the governesses and the maids were engaged, and when I might creep out of the house without being seen. I believe I should have really started on this journey, but for the arrival of my Uncle Ambrose, who came upon me suddenly on the day after I had heard of my mother's illness, and who found me sitting crying alone on the sands.

His was the first voice that brought me comfort; it was upon his breast that I sobbed out my grief, until the burden seemed lightened somehow. He told me that my mother was out of danger now, and that she would soon get well, or at least well enough for me to go home and be with her again, and he said I must try and be a comfort and a consolation to her in the days to come.

I told him I was afraid my mother had left off loving me since father's death. She had not seemed to mind my going away, while I was heart-broken at leaving her. And then he tried to make me understand how in a great grief like my mother's all things seem blotted out, except that one overwhelming loss. He told me that a dark curtain had fallen over my mother's mind; and that I should find her changed from the happy woman I had known in the happy days that were gone.

"But the curtain will be lifted by-and-by, Daisy," he said, "and

you will see your mother's joyous nature return to her. No grief lasts for ever. A year is a long time even for a great sorrow; and in a year your mother will begin to forget."

He meant this for consolation, but my tears broke out afresh at the thought that my father would be forgotten.

"I shall never forget him," I said.

"No, my darling, he will live in your memory and your mother's, but your memory of him will be sad and sweet, instead of bitter and cruel. He will have taken his natural place in the past, and his shadow will not darken the present as it does now."

"Let me go home soon," I said, clinging to him, when he was leaving Westgate later in the afternoon. "Pray, pray, pray let it be soon."

"As soon as ever your mother is well enough to see you, darling," he promised.

I had always been fond of him. He had always had the next place in my heart after my father and mother, but he seemed nearer to me than ever after that day, and he has never lost the place that he took then, or the influence that he had over me then in my desolation.

I spent three more weary weeks at Westgate after this. Aunt Talbot was with a fashionable party in the Highlands, Uncle Talbot was part of his time in Harley Street and part of his time rushing about England and Scotland by express trains to see his most distinguished patients. I used to hear my cousins talk of the places he went to and the people he went to see—great people, all of them. He had the life and sanity of Cabinet Ministers and Bishops in his special custody, and he made them obey his most severe orders in fear and trembling. I used to sit and listen idly in my wretched, low-spirited state while my cousins and the governesses chattered about aunt's gowns and uncle's patients, and I remembered as children remember things in which they take no interest.

At last the happy day came for my going home, and here came Uncle Ambrose to fetch me. "How good it is of you to come so far!" I told him. "You must have other things to do besides coming to fetch me."

"There is no other thing in this world that comes before my duty to my little pupil and her mother," he answered, in his low sympathetic voice.

We went off to the station in an open fly together. I'm sure my lively cousins must have been very glad to get rid of a crying child

that used to mope in corners and sit at meals with a melancholy face; but they couldn't be gladder to part with me than I was to go away. I had tried to take interest in their lessons when the German governess urged me to employ my mind, but their lessons seemed so dull and difficult compared with Uncle Ambrose's way of teaching me. The Fräulein was always grinding at grammar—while, except so far as learning my French verbs, I hardly knew what grammar meant; but, without vanity, it is only fair to Uncle Ambrose to say that at ten years old I knew a great deal more about the history of the world and the people who had lived in it than my Cousin Dora, who was eighteen. And even in those days I knew something about the great poets of the world, of whom Dora and her sisters knew nothing; for Uncle Ambrose had told me all about Dante, and his wonderful history of hell and heaven; and about Goethe, and his Faust; and he had read Milton's story of Adam and Eve and the fallen Angel who tempted them, and Shakespeare's "Tempest," and "As You Like It," and "Midsummer Night's Dream" aloud to me, to familiarize my ear and my mind with poetry, while I was still a child, he said. I had to thank his kindness for all I knew, and for being a better companion to my mother than I could have been if I had had a Fräulein and a Mademoiselle to teach me.

When we were sitting in the railway carriage, and the sun was shining full upon Uncle Ambrose's face, I noticed for the first time that there was a great change in him since the summer. I had been too excited and busy to take notice of it before; but I saw now that he had grown thin and paler, and that he looked older and very ill. I put my arms round him, and kissed him as I used to do in the dear old days. "Poor Uncle Ambrose," I said, "how sorry you must have been! I love you better than ever, dear, because you are so sorry for us." His head was leaning forward on his breast, and he gave one great sob.

That was his only answer.

How distinctly I remember that journey, through the clear September light, by great yellow corn-fields, and the blue bright sea, and then hop-gardens, and orchards full of fruit, and then houses, and houses, and houses, and then at last the air grew dull and thick, and the sun seemed dead, and this was London!

Uncle Ambrose was silent and thoughtful all through the journey, which seemed so long—oh, so long, as if it would never come to an end and bring me to mother and home! I have been to the Highlands since then, and to the Riviera, but those journeys were with

mother, and they did not seem half so long as the journey from Westgate to London, and across London to Paddington, and from Paddington to the little station at Lamford, where we waited for father that evening—for father who was never, never, never coming home to us again.

At the sight of the station, and the station-master's garden—which was all of a blaze with dahlias and hollyhocks now, where the sweet peas had been blooming—I burst into tears. They were the first I had shed since I left Westgate; but the sight of the garden brought back the memory of that evening when I walked up and down with mother, and when we were both so gay and happy, talking of father, and of what he would say and how he would look when we saw his face at the carriage window.

I have but to shut my eyes, even now, after seven years have changed me from a child to almost a woman, and I can see the station lying all among the meadows by the river side, and I can see my father's face as I expected to see it, smiling at us as the train came in—dear, well-remembered face which I was never to see again upon this earth.

There was a carriage at the station to take us home, but mother wasn't in the carriage. When he saw my disappointment, Uncle Ambrose told me that she was still an invalid, and had not gone beyond the garden since her illness.

"You will have to comfort and cheer her with your loving little ways, Daisy," he said; "but you will have to be very quiet and very gentle. It is not long since she could hardly bear the sound of any one's voice. You will find her sadly changed."

"More changed than you are?" I asked.

"Much more. Think how much more trouble she has gone through than I have had to bear."

"But you look as if you couldn't have been more sorry," I said, for indeed I had never seen such sadness in any face as I had seen in his that day.

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Mother was lying on a sofa by the drawing-room fire—the evenings were beginning to be chilly, and she was an invalid—wrapped in a large white China crape shawl, one of father's gifts, which I remembered ever since I could remember anything. There was a middle-aged woman in the room, neatly dressed in black, with a white cap and apron, whom I afterwards knew as one of mother's nurses. She had had two nurses all through her illness, one for the

day and the other for the night; for there had been one dreadful time when it was thought that she might try to kill herself if she were left alone.

Yes, she was changed, more changed than Uncle Ambrose. She was wasted to a shadow, and there was no colour in her face. Even her lips were white. Her beautiful hair, which father had been so proud of, had all been cut off, and she wore a little lace cap, which covered her close-cropped head, and was tied under her chin. Her poor hands were almost transparent.

She gathered me up in her arms, and she kissed and cried over me, and I thought even then that it did her good to have her little daughter back again. She told me years afterwards that those tears were the first that had brought any sense of relief with them. She lifted me into a corner of her sofa, weak as she was, and she kept me there till my bedtime. She had my supper laid upon a little table by the sofa, and she fed me and cared for me with her own feeble hands, in spite of all the nurse could say, and from that night I was with her always.

"You don't know what it is to me to have my little girl again," she said to the nurse; "you don't know what it is to feel this frozen heart beginning to melt, and to know that there is something left in this world that I can love."

She said almost the same words to Uncle Ambrose next day when he came over to River Lawn soon after breakfast, to give me my morning lessons, and I thought he looked more and more sorry as he stood listening to her, with his hand upon the little pile of books which he had brought over from the cottage. He answered mother with a smile a minute afterwards.

"Yes, it is a blessed thing to know we can love and be beloved," he said.

Mother told me afterwards that there was a reason for his sympathizing with her in her sorrow more than any other friend. He, too, had lost his nearest and dearest, his good and devoted young wife, after a brief illness, almost as suddenly as her loss had come upon her. He, too, was alone in the world, but for an only child, his son, of whom he was doubtless very fond. But, mother added, there were times when she fancied that he was fonder of me than of his own son.

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Our lives went on very quietly after that day, and from that day I was mother's only companion. We have never been parted since

my desolate days at Westgate, and we have lived almost out of the world. Mother says that next year when I shall be eighteen she will have to go into society for my sake, and that she will not be able always to go on refusing invitations to garden and tennis parties all along the river banks from Marlow to Reading. It will be only right for me to see a little more of the world, mother says, and to mix with girls of my own age. I suppose I shall like it when the time comes, but I have no longing for parties, or dances, or fine clothes, and my cousins in Harley Street say I am the oddest girl they ever met with, but that it is no wonder I am odd considering the eccentric manner in which I have been educated.

I have been so happy, so happy with mother in all these years, so fond of our pretty house, which grows prettier every year under mother's care, and our gardens, which are looked upon as model gardens by all the neighbourhood. People come and ask to see them, as a great favour; which is rather hard upon mother and me who love seclusion.

For seven years Uncle Ambrose has gone steadily on with my education, never missing a day, except when some slight illness has made either him or me unfit for work. As punctually as the clock strikes ten he appears at the little garden gate nearest his cottage. If the weather is warm we sit in the summer-house, or under the great willow, which grows and grows and grows, as if it were a magic tree. If it is not summery enough for sitting out-of-doors, we work in the morning-room upstairs.

Yes, we have been happy together, mother and I, but we have never forgotten father; we never have come to think less of our great loss. Saddest thoughts have mixed with our happiest hours. We never have forgotten him; we never can forget him. Many women as beautiful and as young-looking as my mother would have married again within two or three years of a first husband's death; but she has never given a thought to any other man than him, and she never will. Once I ventured to ask her if father was her first love; if she had never cared ever so little for any other lover; and she told me that he was the first who had ever spoken to her of love. She was only eighteen when she married; she was only nineteen when I was born. She and my father fell in love with each other at first sight—like a Prince and Princess in a fairy tale.

CHAPTER VI.

DAISY'S DIARY.

I SOMETIMES think mother hardly makes enough of Uncle Ambrose or of his goodness to me. I know she is grateful to him, and proud of my progress, which is all his work. But now and then it seems to me that she keeps him too much at a distance, instead of treating him as if he were her brother and really my uncle. She very seldom comes into the morning-room while I am at my studies there, and there are many days when he leaves the house at one o'clock without having seen her. Once in a way she asks him to stop to lunch, and when she does I can see his pale, fair face light up suddenly with a flush of pleasure, and he is full of life and talk at luncheon, he who is generally so calm and placid, like deep water; and after lunch he lingers and lingers in the garden or in the drawing-room, till mother is obliged to ask him to stay to tea; and after tea he goes away slowly and reluctantly, lingering to the very last, lingering at the gate if it is fine weather, and mother and I go out with him to say good-bye.

He is so fond of us both! It is the little gate in the fence near his cottage at which we say good-bye to Uncle Ambrose—not the gate by which father went out that summer morning, never to come back to us again.

That which was brought back nearly a week afterwards was not my father. That which lies under the grave that mother and I keep bright with flowers is not my father. We know that he is living still—somewhere. Living, or waiting in a placid sleep for the awakening to the new life. We know not how, we know not where; but we believe that he is living still, and that we shall see him again.

As I grow older, and my education goes on, and absorbs more of my master's valuable time, I wonder all the more at the sacrifice which he makes and has been making so long for my sake. When I think that he is a man whose books are valued and praised by the greatest thinkers of his age, a man who might win distinction in almost any walk of literature, I am amazed at his willingness to waste so great a part of his life upon my insignificance. It is all

the more wonderful, perhaps, because, although when he came to live at Lamford he was a poor man, he is now a very rich man, a distant relation having died in America some years ago and left him a large fortune.

I hardly know when the change in his circumstances arose, he himself made so light of the matter. It was Cyril who told me one day that his father was rich.

"Did you ever know such a man as my father," he said, "to go on living in that ugly old cottage when he might have a house in Park Lane and a country-seat into the bargain, if he liked!"

I asked if Uncle Ambrose was really very rich.

"Really, and really, and really, I believe," answered Cyril, "though he has never condescended to enter into particulars with me; but a Yankee fellow at Oxford told me all about the man who left father his fortune, and it was a biggish pile—that's the Yankee's expression, mind you, not mine."

Cyril is at Christchurch, Oxford. He spent his last long vacation in Sweden and Norway. He has promised me that he will spend the next long, or at any rate the earlier part of his time, at Lamford, and that he will take me about in his boat, and that I shall help him with his classics.

I'm afraid this is only idle compliment to me; but Uncle Ambrose says I really might be of some use to Cyril in reading Horace and Virgil with him, and that I know both those poets better than many undergraduates.

If I do I have to thank Uncle Ambrose for my knowledge, and most of all for teaching me to love Latin poetry instead of to hate Latin grammar.

Cyril is sometimes just a little inclined to find fault with his father for living in the small ugly house to which he came in his poverty; but as he has a very liberal allowance, can go where he likes for his vacations, and is never denied anything by the most indulgent of fathers, he feels that he has no right to complain.

"I'm so afraid that other fellows will take it into their heads that my father is a miser," he said one day, "when they find that I have no home to which I can invite them, and that my father mopes away his life in a cottage by the Thames. And the worst part of the business is that most fellows in the University know every yard of ground between Henley and Oxford, and must know Lamford."

I told him that a man could not be said to mope away his life

when he had written two books which had been read and praised all over the civilized world.

"Well, no doubt with some men the books count for something, and they put my father down as an eccentric scholar, living his own retired life, for his own pleasure; but you see there are more fools than sensible people in the world, and the fools must think my father is too fond of money to spend it like a gentleman. I dare say they fancy that his wealth came to him too late in life, and that poverty's penurious habits had got burned into his very nature."

"What does it matter what mistakes people of that kind may make about your father?" I said. "We know that he is a gentleman in every act and thought of his life; and that if he does not spend money upon things that please other people, it is only because he cares for higher things, which don't cost money or make a great show."

"You are right there, Daisy," answered Cyril, "and there are some things he cares for which don't make a show, and do cost money—his books, for instance. There are two or three thousand pounds sunk in his library—rare books, old books, new books, Oriental books, lining the walls of every room in the cottage. Upon my word, now, I can scarcely take my bath of a morning without splashing a tall copy of the Fathers; and yet I can't get him to make up his mind to build a house to hold his treasures. Perhaps when the last inch of wall-space is filled he will begin to think about a change of quarters."

Cyril is not like his father. He takes after his mother's family, I am told. He has not his father's fair skin and blue eyes, or his father's pale and silky hair, or his father's high and thoughtful brow. His eyes are dark gray, his hair is dark brown, his features are smaller and sharper than his father's—a keen, clever face, I have heard people call it; not the face of a thinker and dreamer like Uncle Ambrose. Some call Cyril handsome, and some do not. He has a very kind and bright expression, and is always very good to me. He is tall and straight and tremendously active, a first-rate oarsman, and, I am told, a good shot. He is very fond of Radnorshire and his mother's people, and I think he likes mother and me, though we do not see him very often. He laughs at my education, and says that father would have made me a blue-stocking if Nature had not insisted upon making me something else.

I wonder what that something else is?

Father's grave is in the churchyard at the other end of the village—such a pretty, picturesque sleeping-place for the beloved dead! There is one corner of the churchyard which is separated from the river only by a strip of waste land covered with rushes, and by a low stone wall, clothed with mosses and lichens, gray, and gold, and green—a dear old wall, with fine small-leaved ivy creeping over it here and there, and with fairy-like spleenwort growing out of the interstices of the stone. Just in the angle of the wall nearest the river lies my father's grave, under the shadow of a great willow, like my tree on the lawn. It was because of that tree my mother chose the spot. Father had always talked of the big weeping-willow as Daisy's tree, and mother knew that he was fond of it for his little daughter's sake. So he lies under Daisy's tree, and his only monument is a low red granite cross, with his name and the date of his birth and death. No text, no verse; nothing to say how much he was beloved; only a blank space for mother's name when she is laid beside him. All the rest is garden. Mother thinks the garden tells best of our love for him who lies there, because it is a changeful living thing, and not dead and immutable, like letters carved in marble.

Mother and I do all the work of this little garden with our own hands. No one else is allowed to touch it, and the flowers change with every change of the seasons—from Christmas roses to the pure whiteness of the chrysanthemums in the late autumn; and our garden is always lovely, and full of freshness and perfume. Fair weather or foul, one of us goes there every day. We never miss a day while we are at Lamford. When we are away the garden is left to itself; and when we come back we have to make up for an interval of neglect. We had rather there should be neglect and decay for a little while than that hireling hands should cultivate father's garden.

That corner by the river is very lonely, the most remote from the church and the vicarage, and the path by which people go to church. I have sat there for hours and no one has ever come near me; though I have heard the boats going by, and people talking as they rowed past the little rushy waste outside the wall. Nobody can see me from the river when I am sitting there, for father's tree makes a great green tent, just as my tree does on the lawn at home. Sometimes I hold the soft, drooping greenery apart and peep out at the boats going by in the sunlight, while I sit in cool shadow.

Many and many an afternoon have I spent here with my books

and my Scotch deerhound, Roderick Dhu, more solitary, more secure from interruption than if I had been at home, where any one of the few friends with whom we are intimate might drop in upon me. In the churchyard I have my life all to myself, to read or to think, and I prophesy that a great deal of this diary will be scribbled on the grassy bank under the low wall by my father's grave. There is a little hollow nook all among the ivy and bramble and fern, which is my own particular seat, and I can study there better than anywhere else.

One day Beatrice Reardon came and found me out in my nook, came sailing up to me in her bouncing, noisy way, flourishing her racket.

"So I've found you at last, D," she said. She is one of those girls who can never call anything by its right name, and she frequently calls me D. "Simeon told me you were out for the whole afternoon, but I thought I should unearth you. Come and make up a set."

"Now you have found me, perhaps you'll be kind enough to lose me again," I answered. "I should have thought that even you would understand that when I come to sit by my father's grave I like to be alone, and I don't like tennis rackets."

I don't often lose my temper, but I do think Beatrice Reardon—though no doubt she means well—is a girl who would have exasperated Job. There are times when I feel that a continuance of Beatrice's society would be worse than boils.

"You're a morbid, disagreeable little D," she said, "and you'll find out you're mistaken before you're thirty; for by that time your moping, solitary, cross-grained ways will make you look forty, and *then* you'll be sorry."

She marched off with her racket on her shoulder, singing "Gather your roses while ye may," in her loud mezzo-soprano voice, *the* voice of Lamford and two villages beyond, and I am happy to say she never invaded my peaceful corner again.

Here I read the sixth book of the Eneid, and here I read Dante, until I felt as if I were more familiar with the world of shadows than the world of realities. Here I learnt those odes which Uncle Ambrose chose for me in my little Horace, and my favourite bits from the Georgics, and my favourite Eclogues. Here I read Milton and Shakespeare. The spot is full of lovely images and haunting fancies.

We have very few friends, though mother is obliged to be civil to

a good many acquaintances scattered about the happy river, between Henley Bridge and Caversham Weir. She visits very little—only in the quietest way at the houses of her oldest friends, the people she knew best in my father's time. The only families of whom we see much are the Rector's and the Doctor's, for mother's charities bring her in contact with both, and as there are girls in both families I have been invited very often to play tennis or to join in water picnics, or any other homely festivities. I have never gone to parties at either house since I was a child, and the girls laugh at me for my solitary bringing-up: but mother and I have been too happy in our own quiet way for me to think that I lose much in staying away from the Reardons' birthday dances and hobbledehoy parties out of doors and in.

Not a hundred miles from Lamford there is a big red house by the river, called Templemead, which once belonged to a noble family, and which is now occupied by Mr. Copeland, who coaches young men for the Army. Some of the young men are the sons of noble families, and many of them are rich, and I'm afraid I must say that most of them behave badly. The Rector says animal spirits, I say bad manners. The Rector says that as I have never had a brother I don't understand young men's ways; and certainly, judging by Cyril's account of the goings on at Christchurch, young men must be extraordinary creatures, with the oddest ideas of pleasure.

Cyril says that if Mr. Reardon had not three daughters to marry he would not be quite so charitable in his opinion of Mr. Copeland's young men; but I don't think our dear old Rector is a contriving sort of person; and I don't think one ought to be too hard upon Mrs. Reardon for giving so many tennis parties, and Cinderella dances, and blind-man's-buff parties, and water picnics; for three daughters to marry must mean hard work for any mother.

Mrs. Tysoe, the doctor's wife, has two sons and only one daughter; so there is not nearly so much excuse for her; and I must say she does make rather too much of those unmannerly hobbledehoys from Templemead; nor can I conceal from my dear Diary that Laura Tysoe's conversation would be more entertaining if it were not all about Mr. Copeland's young men.

I am afraid my Diary is going to develop all the worst propensities in my nature—above all, the propensity for thinking too much of myself and looking down upon other people. A Diary is such a safe confidante; and it is such a comfort to know one can say just

what one likes without any fear of having one's silly babble babbled about and made sillier by one's dearest friend.

So, dear Diary, I mean to scribble just what I like in your nice, smooth, white pages: and when my foolishness has all run off in pen and ink, I have only to turn the key in your neat little brass lever lock, and my secrets are as safe as if they were shut up in the heart of the biggest pyramid.

CHAPTER VII.

SHE ANSWERED, "STAY."

SEVEN years! Robert Hatrell had been lying in his grave seven years and a day, and Ambrose Arden was slowly pacing the river-terrace which the dead man planned in the pride of his heart while his murderer was lying in wait for him somewhere in the big city yonder, far away to the east, where the bright blue sky changed to a dull and heavy grey. Ambrose Arden and Clara Hatrell were walking side by side upon the broad, gravel terrace between two rows of cypresses; she with a slow and listless step; he suiting his pace to hers, but by no means listless, intent rather, watching every change in the pensive face, every shade upon the fair forehead.

Seven years and a day had he been lying in his grave—seven years and seven days had gone by since he was found stark and cold, in a "two pair back" bedroom in a shabby lodging-house near St. Giles's church, a wonder and a mystery to all England. For seven years his widow had mourned him, missing him and regretting him every day of her life—albeit calmly content in her quiet lot with the daughter she adored—brooding over the tragedy of his death, brooding over the cruel destiny which had sundered so perfect a union.

Her sorrow was in no wise diminished by the years that had come and gone—her memory of the beloved dead was no less vivid than it was before the first flowers had bloomed upon his grave. He was still in her mind the one loved and lovable of men—her first and her only lover. Time had brought calmness and resignation; but Time had not weakened love.

Ambrose Arden, walking by her side in the sultry stillness of the

July afternoon, knew her heart almost as well as she knew it herself.

Seven years had made little alteration externally in Robert Hatrell's widow, or in Robert Hatrell's friend. At six and thirty Clara Hatrell was still a beautiful woman, so much the lovelier, perhaps in her calm maturity for the seclusion and repose of her widowhood.

The cares and excitements of the woman of society had not written premature wrinkles on the broad white brow. The disappointments and vexations of the fashionable world had not drawn down the corners of the mobile mouth or pinched the perfect oval of the cheek.

Ambrose Arden was exactly the man he had been seven years before—fair complexioned, dreamy-eyed, with the scholar's bent shoulders and with the scholar's measured accents. A remarkable-looking man always, and a fine-looking man in spite of those stooping shoulders and the slow meditative walk; a man to attract the admiration and the love of women, as being different from his fellow men, and with something of that power which women call magnetic in his thoughful eyes—so blue, so clear, with the colour and transparence of childhood, yet with such an unfathomable depth of thought.

Seven years, and in all that length of months and weeks and days he had been this woman's slave; and she knew it not. Day and night, waking or sleeping, near or far, he had adored her; and she knew it not. Seven years since her husband's death, and how many years before? Only since the hour he first looked upon her, when it had been to him as if the heart within him, a strong and passionate heart—whose forces he had never known till that moment—leaped suddenly into life and linked his fate with hers for ever.

He had married a fair young wife, and he had been a good and tender husband. He had truly and tenderly mourned the early dead. But till he met Clara Hatrell he knew not what passion meant.

He knew not, and could never hope to know, what it was that made this woman different from all other women upon earth, the one supreme mistress of his life, whom to serve was destiny, whom to love was a necessity of his being.

And so for seven years and more before her husband's death, and for seven years after, he had been her idolator and slave; she nothing knowing—accepting his quiet attentions as calmly as she

took a basket of hothouse flowers from her gardener, asking no questions of her own heart or of his, thinking of him only as an amiable eccentric, who lived at her gates because it was his fancy so to live, who gave one-third of his life to the tuition of her child, because it was his whim so to waste himself.

Her kindnesses to him had been of the slightest, for in her widowed loneliness it had behoved her to keep even so old a friend somewhat aloof, lest the little world of Lamford should begin to have ideas and speculations about her and her daughter's teacher. She had kept her life completely apart from the life of pupil and master, and had on rarest occasions offered hospitality to the man to whom she owed so much. To his son she had been more frankly kind, treating him almost as a son of the house, and letting him feel that he was always welcome. Even to Cyril's college friends her house had been open, and he had in no wise stretched his privileges; though there were occasions upon which he was glad to take a boating friend to River Lawn rather than to his own cottage home, with its shabby furniture, and atmosphere of over-much learning.

Thus had he worshipped her, faithfully and silently, for fourteen years, just the length of Jacob's servitude for Rachel; and she was still afar off, cold as marble, unresponsive, unconscious of his love. It was a hard thing to have been so patient, and to have waited so long, and to be no nearer the goal—to feel the golden years of manhood slipping away like those faded lilies yonder drifting with the current, flowers which some careless hand had plucked and flung away. It was hard. It was more difficult to be patient now when he felt the glory and strength of life beginning to wane. Was he to be an old man before he dared ask for his guerdon—he who had done so much to win his beloved; who had sacrificed for her sake all that other men care for?

To-day his heart was throbbing with a new vehemence, and there was a fire in his thoughts that must needs burst into a blaze before long. Everything in life has its limits; even the patience of a man who loves as Ambrose Arden loved.

"Daisy grows prettier, and more womanly every day," he said, after a contemplative silence of some minutes. "You must not waste her life as you have wasted your own—since your bereavement. I conclude that you intend to go into society next season, if only for her sake."

"I have been thinking about it," Clara answered quietly, "and I

suppose it must be so. Poor child, she has seen very little of the world, but we have been so happy together, so completely united, that I do not think my Daisy will ever regret her solitary girlhood. However, everything must come to an end," with a faint sigh, "so I have asked my sister Emily to look out for a furnished house at the West End, in Wilton Crescent, or somewhere about there, and if she can find one that Daisy and I like, I shall take it next January. You must come and see us in our new home," she added, smiling at him with her calm and friendly smile.

"I should seem like a fish out of water among smart people."

"You might feel bored by their frivolity, but the smart people would be very glad to know you. They must all have heard of your books."

"Heard of them, yes: read them, no. I fancy there are not many smart people who care for the makers of books—only the intellectual few, the stars of the smart world, who have found time to cultivate their minds as well as to shine in society."

"Cyril will come to us often, I hope," she said cordially. "I shall have to give parties, and I must have a day for callers. It will be all very dreadful."

This time her sigh was deep and long.

"Why dreadful?" he asked. "You who are still young, still beautiful, and rich enough to indulge your caprices, are not a woman to shrink from society."

"Am I not? Oh! Mr. Arden, how can you be so short-sighted? Do you think it will be no ordeal to me to face strangers? Do you forget that I am the widow of a man who was cruelly and mysteriously murdered, and whose murder set all England talking and wondering? I shrink with horror from the thought of going into society, knowing that people will whisper about me, and point me out to each other in every room I enter. But that isn't the worst! Daisy will hear. Daisy will be told the dreadful history we have kept hidden from her. Here people are kind and considerate, and they have respected her feelings—but in London it will be different."

"True, she cannot be so fenced round and protected in society as she has been among your few intimate friends here," answered Arden, thoughtfully, "but seven years are a long time. Dynasties are forgotten within a lesser period. Look at France, for instance, and see how little trace is left of a fallen empire, and a suicidal war. *Tout passe, tout lasse, tout casse.* That tragedy which made so

deep a mark in your life is forgotten by the world at large. I do not think you need fear any annoyance either for yourself or Daisy. But there is one way by which you could put a barrier between the present and the past, if you would but take that way."

His pale face flushed as he drew nearer to her, his eyes lighted with a sudden fire as he laid his long white hand upon her shoulder, stopping her almost imperiously, looking down at her with a resoluteness that gave to his face something of the eagle look which belongs to conquering natures.

"What way?" she faltered, perplexed by that sudden change in a familiar face.

"Take my name instead of yours. Let Robert Hatrell's widow vanish in Ambrose Arden's wife. Clara, I cannot be eloquent where all I value on earth is at stake. I love you—I have loved you ever since—no, I dare not say how long. Only remember that I have never offended you by one whisper of my consuming love. I have waited, waited, waited, until it seems to me that my life is like the children of Israel's pilgrimage through the desert—so long, so weary, so far from the Promised Land. Let me not be like their leader. Let me not die with the haven of my hope seen dimly in unattainable distance. I have been patient, have I not? I have never offended you, Clara."

"Offended me? no! You have been a kind and devoted friend," she answered quickly, "but I never thought you wanted to be more than a friend. Nothing was further from my thoughts—nothing," she went on, in an embarrassed manner; and then, with a sudden transition to warmest feeling, she exclaimed, "You know how I loved him. You know how dear his image is to me. It would be treason to care for any one else. It would be cowardice to take another name. I am the widow of Robert Hatrell, of him whom some devil murdered. Marry again! Call myself by another name! Why, to be true to the past I ought to give up all my future life to one continuous endeavour to bring his murderer to justice."

"My dearest, in plays and in novels murderers are brought to the scaffold by devoted women like you, after any interval the novelist or dramatist may find convenient, but in real life there is only one kind of machinery that works, and that is the much abused police. When the police, stimulated by the offer of a large reward, cannot find a criminal within seven years from the date of the crime, you may be sure the criminal is safe. The odds are that the murderer who is not caught within a week has saved his neck. In the case

of my lamented friend the assassin was a man of peculiar audacity —prompt, resolute, unflinching, and there is strong reason to believe that the murder in Denmark Street was not his first crime."

"Not his first?" cried Clara Hatrell, with a sudden vehemence which startled her lover. "Then it will not be his last crime; and he will be caught sooner or later, like the man in Vienna the other day."

The man in Vienna was a professional murderer who had been trapped like a wild beast after a series of crimes. When trapped, condemned, and assured that his case was hopeless, he made a full confession of his guilty deeds, gloating over the revolting details, proud of having struck horror to the hearts of his fellow-men.

"He will be caught some day," said Clara Hatrell, "just as that Austrian was caught, red-handed, and he will confess his catalogue of crimes."

The scholar was silent for a few moments, and then answered quietly.

"Such cases as those are rare; but, as you say, the murderer may confess some day. Clara, it is time you drew a veil over that dark and cruel past; it is time you took pity on the man who loves you. Oh, my beloved, I have no words to tell my love. I have given you years of my life where other men give words. I have waited seven years; and now I feel that I have spoken too soon."

There was a marble bench near the spot where they were standing—an antique seat which had been brought from Rome to adorn Mrs. Hatrell's garden. Ambrose Arden staggered a few paces forward and flung himself upon this bench, and there, with his face hidden in his hands, sobbed out his passion, with sobs which shook his powerful frame, and swelled the veins upon his clasped hands.

That agony of grief touched Clara Hatrell with sudden pity. He had been so good and true; and it was love, devoted love for her which had chained him to the dull monotony of a life that was a puzzle to the people who knew his talent and his means. It was for her he had sacrificed himself, for her sake he had educated her child as never child was educated before. And he had been her husband's trusted friend and adviser; her husband's better sense. What more faithful friend, what wiser counsellor and guide could she choose for herself in the labyrinth of life?

What should she say to him? Was she to bid him wait and hope, or to tell him plainly that she could never be his wife? She

had vowed no vow to remain single all her life; for it had seemed to her in her fond regret that a second marriage for her was of all things upon this earth the least possible. There had been no spoken promise to her child; but Daisy had taken it for granted that her mother would be constant to the dead, until death reunited the broken bond, until she should lie down by his side, his true wife in the grave.

Pity and gratitude moved her profoundly at sight of Ambrose Arden's agony. He fought against his weakness, as a strong man fights his foe, until those convulsive sobs came at longer intervals, and the powerful shoulders ceased to heave. At last, with a final struggle, he dashed the tears from his eyes, rose from the bench, and stood before her, calm and still, but disfigured by the vermillion stain upon his eyelids and the deathly pallor of cheek and lip.

"Forgive me for having made a fool of myself, Mrs. Hatrell," he said huskily; "I ought to have known better. I ought not to have trusted myself to speak. How you must despise me!"

She held out her hand to him, with a gentle seriousness.

"Despise you?" she repeated gently. "Can you think me so base as not to be grateful for your patient friendship, and for your love? But you should not have spoken to me of love. You should remember that my heart is buried in my husband's grave—yet believe, at least, that I am not ungrateful. Let us be friends as we have been in the quiet years that have come and gone since his untimely death."

"No, no, Clara—that passive bliss—that paradise of the dead—is over. Friendship is too thin a mask for passion. I could not go on acting my part—after to-day. It must be all or nothing."

She hung her head, and the slow tears rolled down her cheeks. She did not love him, but she felt herself bound to him by a friendship that ought to be lifelong, and her heart brimmed over with womanly compassion.

"It must be all or nothing, Clara," he repeated, still holding the hand that she had given him in assurance of friendship. "I must leave you at once and for ever, or stay with the hope of winning you."

"Stay," she answered gently.

* * * *

He dined at River Lawn that evening for the first time since Robert Hatrell's death, a cosy little party of three, his pupil pleased to have his company, and full of affectionate attentions to him all

through the repast, complaining of his want of appetite, his indifference to certain dishes which Cyril liked, and which were really worthy of his notice. They dined in one of the old cottage rooms, a room with a low ceiling, an old-fashioned dado and chimneypiece, and a bow window, the best parlour of the original building. The dining-room had been very little used during Clara's widowhood.

They took their coffee in the verandah, in front of the drawing-room, enjoying the beauty of the night and the newly risen moon.

"Shall I play you a little Mozart?" asked Daisy: and without waiting for an answer she left them and seated herself at the grand piano, from whence she could see them dimly, as they sat in the shadow of the clematis and magnolia which overhung the verandah.

She was not a brilliant pianiste, having given only her leisure hours to music; but she played with delicacy and expression, and as she had been content to devote herself for the most part to one composer, she had learnt to interpret his compositions with feeling and understanding.

"Mozart is enough for one lifetime," she said, when her cousins ridiculed her limited répertoire, being taught by a master who discovered a new Sclavonic composer every quarter. "I never hope to play as well as he ought to be played if I go on working all the days of my life."

The clever fingers flew over the keys in the light and airy Fisher variations. The round white wrist moved with easy grace in the passages for crossed hands, the player looking straight before her all the time at those two motionless figures between the lamp-light and the moon.

How earnestly he bent over her mother as he talked! how still her mother sat, with slightly drooping head! and how odd that on this one day in seven years her mother should ask him to dinner, and allow him to spend the evening in a long *tête-à-tête!* She had kept him at such a distance hitherto that any departure from the old habit seemed strange.

* * * * *

It was Daisy's custom to spend half an hour or so in her mother's room before going to bed. These two, who lived together always, had so much to say to each other that the day seemed insufficient for confidential talk, and if the girl happened to be deprived of her nightly *tête-à-tête* she would complain that she saw nothing of her mother, and was altogether hardly used.

On this particular evening, after Mr. Arden had wished them good night and strolled across to his cottage on the other side of the lane, the mother and daughter walked up and down the terrace two or three times in the moonlight before going indoors for good; and then the doors were shut and locked, and the lamps were put out, the River Lawn sank into darkness, except for five lighted windows on the first floor. Three of these windows, which opened on a wide balcony, belonged to Mrs. Hatrell's bedroom and boudoir, the other two were Daisy's, and the lamplight shone through artistic terra-cotta muslin curtains which the girl had draped with her own hands. The boudoir was one of the prettiest rooms in the house. It had been planned and furnished by Robert Hatrell as an offering to the wife he admired, and both Clara and her daughter loved it all the more for the sake of the love that had presided over its creation. Here, in the subdued light of a shaded lamp, Clara sank somewhat wearily into a deep armchair, and sat silent, while Daisy moved about the room, looking at the water-colour studies on the wall—a Surrey lane by Birkett Foster, a girlish head by Dobson, a street corner in Venice by Clara Montalba—or, lightly touching the books, the Dresden china boxes, and Indian bronzes on the tables, in idle restlessness.

"You look tired to-night, mother dear," she said presently, watchful of her mother's troubled face.

"Yes, dear, I am very tired."

"And yet you have not been beyond the gardens to-day. It must be the heat that tired you. I was so glad you asked Uncle Ambrose to dinner, for once in a way. You are not very hospitable to him, you know. He does not get much attention from you in return for all his goodness to me."

"You know I am grateful to him, Daisy; but you and I living alone together can hardly be expected to entertain gentlemen."

"Why, mother, you surely don't suppose that people would talk if he were to dine here every day. What a strange idea! Uncle Ambrose. A confirmed old bachelor."

"People are more ready to talk than you would ever suppose, Daisy. Mr. Arden is not an old man."

"Not in years, but he is old in thoughts and habits. He is not like other men."

"No, he is not like other men. He has deeper feelings than most men. Come here, darling, and be quiet if you can. You make me nervous while you are moving about and touching things."

"I will be a very mouse for tranquillity, mother dear," cried the girl, sinking into a half-sitting, half-kneeling position at her mother's feet.

The mother caressed the dark brown hair, tenderly touched the broad forehead, above hazel eyes that were like her own—eyes that looked wonderingly at her, seeing an unwonted trouble in her face.

"Daisy, would it distress you if—if—in time to come I were to marry again?"

"Distress me? No, mother. It would be only natural that you should marry again—you who are so handsome and so young-looking—if you could meet any one good enough for you. No, I am not such a selfish, ungrateful daughter as to be distressed at any change which would make your life happy. I should be jealous—no doubt, horribly jealous, after having had you all to myself—and I should hate the man. I hate him already in anticipation, without knowing what he is like or where he is coming from, or when he will come. But don't be frightened, dearest, for your sake I should do my best to behave admirably, and I would try and school myself to tolerate the——" She screwed up her lips as if some abusive epithet were on the point of utterance, and ended in a loud, clear voice with the monosyllable "MAN!"

"But what if it were some one you like already—some one you love, Daisy?"

"Some one I love—a man! Why, that could be only one man in the world—Uncle Ambrose," exclaimed Daisy, gazing at her mother with widely opened eyes, surprised and half incredulous.

"It is Mr. Arden who urges me to marry him. No thought of a second marriage would ever have entered my head but for him."

"Uncle Ambrose! What an absurd idea!" said Daisy, slowly. "Uncle Ambrose!"—lingering over the name. "Uncle Ambrose in love, like a young man! It seems almost ridiculous."

"Girls of seventeen think that hearts are cold and numbed with age at forty," said Clara Hatrell; "but it is not always so. There are attachments that outlast youth."

"Yes, mother dear, I can quite understand that, and if it had been the colonel of a cavalry regiment—a fine, handsome man who had distinguished himself in India, with an iron-grey moustache—or a politician, a man of the world—I shouldn't have been a bit surprised to hear that he was madly in love with you. But Uncle Ambrose! A man who only lives to read books that other people don't read, and brood over questions that other people don't under-

stand! I could never imagine such a man as that in love. He has talked to me of his wife, and of his grief when he lost her; but I could hear in his placid way of talking that he had never been in love with her—not as Rochester was in love with Jane, or Ravenswood with Lucy," concluded Daisy, whose examples and pictures of life were all taken from her favourite novels.

"Well, Daisy," I was of your opinion yesterday, and I, too, thought Mr. Arden incapable of a romantic attachment; but now he has shown me his heart—such an unselfish, devoted heart—a heart which beats only for you and Cyril and me. He is not happy, Daisy dear. His lonely life is killing him, though people think he is a recluse by choice. He longs for a fuller life—for a home. He asked me to marry him, after waiting seven years to prove his fidelity to me, and his respect for the friend he lost in my dear husband. If I refuse we shall see him no more—you will lose your kind master."

"And if you say 'yes' he will live with us always," exclaimed Daisy. "I have often thought you unkind for turning him out of the house when he evidently longed to stay. I have even thought you ungrateful; but it would be very grateful of you to marry him."

"You talk as if you would like me to marry him, Daisy. Would you really?"

"Yes, I really would, for his sake, because I think he deserves a good deal more attention than you have ever shown him. Only there is one thing——"

"What is that, pet?"

"I could never call him father. I could never speak the word I spoke at the gate that fatal morning when my own dear father bade us good-bye. He would be Uncle Ambrose to the end."

There was a silence, during which the mother sat with downcast eyelids and thoughtful brow; perplexed, uncertain, wavering between two opinions; and then Daisy began again with a startling suddenness.

"You would be Cyril's mother, and I should be his sister. It would be very nice to have such a clever brother."

Another silence; another sudden burst of speech from Daisy.

"There is one question I have not asked you," she said impressively. "Do you love him?"

"I answered that question in advance, Daisy, a year ago, when we were talking together on this spot, just as we are talking to-night. I told you then that your father was my first love, and

that he would be my last. That is as true now as it was a year ago; it will be true to the end of my life."

"Poor Uncle Ambrose!" sighed Daisy. "I have always pitied a man who marries a widow. You know what Guy Darrell says in 'What Will He Do With It?' 'Nothing so insipid as a heart warmed up.' And yet that very Guy Darrell marries a widow, after all. Poor Uncle Ambrose! But you don't dislike him, do you, mother?"

"Dislike him? No. He is the one man I would choose for a friend and counsellor. I respect and admire him for his fine character—so free from unworthy ambitions, so single-minded—and for his intellect. There is no one I would sooner have as my friend and companion—no one whom I would rather obey."

"In those things where women do obey their husbands," said Daisy, making a wry face. "I am not over fond of that word 'obedience;' and I hope, if ever I marry, my husband will not have the bad taste to pronounce it in my hearing. Dear, dearest one," with a sudden change to earnestness, "there are tears streaming down your cheeks. Are you unhappy, mother?"

"No, love, only troubled and undecided. I want to act for the best."

"Then I really think you ought to marry Uncle Ambrose. He is so devoted to us both, and he knows so much; and it will be very nice to have him and Cyril by our fireside on a winter evening."

Mother and daughter kissed with tears, and Daisy sobbed out her emotions on her mother's breast; and the end of this confidential talk was Clara Hatrell's promise to marry the man who adored her.

CHAPTER VIII.

DAISY'S HONEYMOON DIARY.

How strange life is! The change that has come in my life came so suddenly that I fancied I should never be accustomed to the new state of things; yet after a little more than a month I feel as if Uncle Ambrose had lived with us for years, and as if I had always been one of a united family of four instead of the other half of my mother's soul.

In my thoughts of her I have always called her what Horace called Virgil—*Animæ dimidium meæ.*

Have I lost her now that she is Ambrose Arden's wife; or rather, how much of her love and her sweet companionship have I lost?

Naturally there is a loss. I cannot be to her quite what I was before she gave herself to a husband who worships her, who seems jealous of every thought and every moment she gives to any one but himself. We can no longer live like Hermia and Helena, before Puck set them by the ears. We are no longer more like sisters than mother and daughter, as people used to say we were in the old days which begin to look so far away. No, it must be owned there is a loss, and a loss that I shall feel all my life; but it is not so great a loss as to make me unhappy; for I know my mother loves me as truly and fondly as ever, and that she would not part with me for anything in the world. I know that Uncle Ambrose thoroughly deserves her love, and that he is doing his utmost to win it. I know that to me he is a good and true friend, and that I am never tired of his society. I know that the atmosphere of love in which I have lived all my life has lost none of its warmth and brightness. I know I am a girl in a thousand for good fortune, and that I ought to be very grateful to Providence for all my blessings.

As I have failed in all my attempts to write a novel, I mean to make this journal the book of my life, and to put all of my thoughts and all my fancies into it. I shall describe things as vividly as ever I can; so that when I am an old woman I can look back upon the history of my life, and find my youth still fresh and bright in these pages.

Let me record the great event which has made so marked a change in my mother's life—her second marriage. It is a very curious sensation for a girl to stand by and see her mother married. It seemed to me always as if time had gone backwards, and mother were a girl again standing on the threshold of life.

Uncle Ambrose was a most devoted lover, and would hardly let my mother out of his sight during their very short courtship. When mother accepted him I knew that a short engagement was very far from her thoughts. Gratitude prevailed with her, and rather than lose so valued a friend she consented to take him as a husband; but when she gave that consent last July she certainly had no idea of marrying him early in September.

However, those serious and placid people are much more persistent than impetuous characters, like my beloved father, for instance; and Uncle Ambrose contrived to talk my dear mother into an almost immediate marriage. Of course there was not the least reason why they should delay their wedding; for as both are rich there could be no question of ways and means; and as neither of them is young, it might seem a pity to lose time. Nor is mother the kind of person to waste six months upon the preparation of a trousseau. She is always charmingly dressed, though it is only within the last year or two that she has consented to wear anything but black; and her wardrobe is full of beautiful things—so it would be idle vanity to wait for a heap of new clothes to be made, and during that delay to lose the beauty of the autumn for her honeymoon tour.

It was decided at the very first discussion of the honeymoon that I was to travel with them after the first week, which they were to spend very quietly together at Folkestone, just to get used to the idea of being all in all to each other. A great many places were proposed and discussed, and finally it was settled that we should spend the autumn in Switzerland, and go on to Italy in the beginning of the winter.

Where do you think we are going to spend the winter, dear Diary? In what particular city among all the cities of the world is our home to be? It is like a dream. I turn giddy at the very thought of it. We are to winter in Venice. We are to live within a stone's throw of the Doge's Palace and the Lion's Mouth. I am to see the Bridge of Sighs so often, going backwards and forwards in my gondola, that I shall get to think no more of it than I do of Lamford Lock. Yes, it is enough to turn any girl giddy.

I want to preserve all the details of that wonderful day—my mother's wedding-day. It was a perfect morning—as lovely a day as there has been all through the summer, which ought to have been over, but which was just then in its prime, for that first week of September was hotter and brighter than July. The dear old church, and the graveyard where father lies, and the village, and the river were basking in a faint haze of heat, which hung over all things, like a bridal veil. Mother and I drove to church together, she very pale, and with a distressed look about her beautiful mouth, which made me feel sorry I had not begged and prayed her *not* to marry again; for I felt that her heart was with her first love, lying in his

grave under the willow, and not with the man who was so soon to be called her husband.

She looked lovely, in spite of her marble whiteness—lovely, but not like a bride. Her soft fawn-coloured silk gown harmonized with her rich brown hair, and became her admirably. So did the little fawn-coloured bonnet with a bunch of corn-flowers. She was dressed for the journey to Folkestone, where they were to arrive in time for dinner. There were no wedding guests, except Aunt Emily and her husband, my cousins, the Reardon girls, the Rector and his wife, and good old Mr. Mellidew, my father's lawyer. I carried mother's sunshade, and I was to hold her gloves while she was being married.

Everything had been kept so quiet, thanks to the Rector, that very few people in the neighbourhood knew that mother and Mr. Arden were going to be married, and only about half a dozen knew that this was their wedding-day. So the church was almost empty. There were no school children to strew flowers. There was nothing in their pathway as they left the church but the sunshine, and the shadows of the old yew branches that lay darkly across the path. I think I like that utter simplicity better than what people call a picturesque wedding. There was just one thing out of the common in the whole ceremony. We have a fine old organ at Lamford, an organ built in the reign of George the Second, but we have a very poor organist. Great therefore was my amazement to hear a Gloria of Mozart's played by a master-hand, as we walked up the nave; and when mother and her new husband came out of the vestry, arm in arm, the same master-hand attacked the opening chords of Mendelssohn's "Wedding March" with a power which must have startled and thrilled everybody in the church, as it startled and thrilled me.

"Whoever that was, it wasn't Mr. Parkins," I said to Cyril, as he handed me into the second carriage—Mr. and Mrs. Arden—oh, how strange it seems to write it!—having gone away in the first.

"It was not Mr. Parkins. It was Mr. Daventry, the organist of New, an old friend of my father's."

"What brought him to Lamford?"

"Friendship. My father asked him to give us a touch of his quality upon this particular day. He knows your mother is *fanatica per la musica*, and he wanted to please her."

"I call that a very delicate attention," said I, delighted.

"Do you, child?" exclaimed Cyril, in a scornful way. "Perhaps you don't know that if it would please your mother for him to cut his heart out, he would pay her *that* delicate attention just as willingly as this."

"You are not jealous, are you, Cyril?"

We had the carriage to ourselves by an accident. Beatrice was to have gone with us, but had arrived at the church in a state of bewilderment, and had got into the landau with Aunt Emily, Mrs. Reardon, and my Cousin Flora, who grumbled all the rest of the day at having her frock crushed by overcrowding.

"Jealous!" exclaimed Cyril; "no, I am not jealous, and I admire my new mother"—how ready *he* was with that sacred name —"almost as much as my father does. But I can't help pitying any man as deep in love as my father. It is a spectacle of human weakness which, being human, one must pity and deplore, lest the same thing should happen to one's self."

"I hope they will both be happy," said I. "I adore my mother, and I love Uncle Ambrose; but I would rather have gone on caring for him in the old quiet way, and have kept my mother all to myself."

"Egotistical puss," said Cyril. "Do you know, Daisy, that you have the egotistical nose—not a bad nose, in its way, but speaking volumes for the character of the *nosee*. A pert nose—straight and delicate in line, but with just that upward tilt which means vanity and self-consciousness."

"I suppose now you are a kind of brother you are going to be rude to me," said I.

"Decidedly. I mean to take every fraternal privilege," answered he.

And then, without a word of warning, he kissed me.

I was desperately angry.

"*That* is a fraternal privilege which you will please to forego in the future," I said. "I adopted your father for my uncle when you were a small schoolboy, but I never adopted you. And in our enlightened age no one supposes that you are any more my brother because your father has married my mother than you were yesterday when they were only engaged."

"But just now you said I was your brother. What an inconsistent girl you are."

"I said a kind of brother."

"Not the real thing. Very well, Daisy, I hope you may never

want to put me upon the fraternal level. I assure you that *I* don't desire it."

This was so rude on his part that I lost my temper altogether.

"You are a SMUG," I said.

I trembled when I had uttered that awful word, expecting that he would want to annihilate me, but he only laughed, which was worse.

"I am getting behind the scenes," he said; "and my first discovery is a vixen in the family."

We were at home by this time, and went in to luncheon.

It was not a very gay feast, though Uncle Ambrose looked intensely happy. I had been surprised by his appearance as he stood beside my mother at the altar.

He had been gradually changing for the better in his looks and bearing ever since he was engaged, but on his wedding day the transformation seemed to have completed itself. He who used to stoop now carried himself with an erect and noble air. His clear blue eyes seemed to have more colour in them; and, oh! there was such a look of happiness in every line of his face.

Then, as for his clothes, he who used to wear a coat that was almost disgracefully shabby was now dressed to perfection, in a style that was neither too young nor too old. I really felt proud of Uncle Ambrose as I watched him leave the church with my mother on his arm, and later, when we were all clustered at the gate to see them start for their honeymoon. And then, as he bade me good-bye, I could but think of that other parting, seven years ago—the parting which meant for ever.

The carriage drove away, with one of my shoes flying after it, thrown by Cyril, who has a great reputation for throwing the hammer, and who threw my poor little bronze slipper so as to lodge it between the carriage and the lamp, like a decoration. I had to hop back to the hall, which seemed so ridiculous that, while I was ready to cry at parting with my mother, the absurdity of the thing made me laugh instead, and then, three minutes afterwards, the laughter and tears got mixed and I was sobbing hysterically on Cyril's shoulder.

Aunt Emily took me away from him, and scolded me for being so foolish as to make such a fuss about such a brief parting.

"You will see your mother again in a week, you silly child," she said. "One would think she was going to Australia. Why, my girls and I are sometimes parted for six or eight weeks at a time."

"But they are used to it," I answered; as indeed they are, poor things, and have been from their infancy. "It's different with mother and me. We have never lived apart."

I ran upstairs as soon as I could slip away from the family party, and had a comfortable cry in my own room, while Flora and Dora played tennis with Cyril and Beatrice. They were all very noisy, so I suppose they were enjoying themselves. Even though I was so miserable I couldn't help noticing the difference between Beatrice's country noise and Flo and Do's London noise. My cousins are what people call stylish girls, and have a dashing, off-hand way of talking and doing everything. Beatrice, on the other hand, has a kind of lumbering vivacity, which I hope it is not ill-natured to compare with a brewer's horse in high spirits.

Aunt Emily and the cousins were installed at River Lawn for a week, and at the end of that week aunt was to take me to Folkestone to join mother and her new husband, and from Folkestone we were to start for Switzerland.

Oh, how I counted the hours in that week, and how it seemed to me as if those seven days and nights would never come to an end! How I sickened of tennis and boating, and of all the things which amused my cousins! How I sickened even of Cyril, who used to come across from the cottage at all hours, and who devoted himself to Flora and Dora, and was very kind in asking me to join in their boating excursions up or down the river! They used to start soon after breakfast with a well-filled picnic basket, and land at any spot they fancied, and eat their lunch in some picturesque corner, and they came home to afternoon tea sunburnt to a degree that horrified Aunt Emily.

"Are you aware that your complexions will never recover from such treatment as this?" she asked them solemnly.

Cyril was to start for his travels on the day I set out upon mine. He was going to the Norwegian Fjords to fish for salmon. I cannot understand the rage some people have for chilly, half-civilized countries, where there are all the glories and grandeur of the South waiting to be looked at. Imagine anybody preferring Norway to Venice! Cyril does. Venice is so *triste*, he said. And then he promised me that if I were a very good little girl, and sent him a nice long gossiping letter every week, he would join us at Venice for a week or so, just to see if I were dying of too much Paul Veronese.

"You will be dosed with that fellow and his school," he said;

"made to look up at ceilings till your eyes and your neck ache. If people would only let one alone in foreign cities, travelling would not be half such a trial as it is; but there is always the intelligent companion, bent upon improving one's mind."

Cyril had grown *blasé*, from having been allowed to go wherever he chose. He has seen all that is best worth seeing in Europe, and a sunny corner of Africa into the bargain. He has travelled all through Greece, and thinks no more of Marathon than I do of Maidenhead. I sometimes think it has been a disadvantage for him to have so much money, and that he would be ever so much nicer if Uncle Ambrose had never come into his fortune. He is kind and generous, and high-spirited; but he values himself just a little too much; and he seems to think the world is hardly good enough for him to live in.

Mother was at the station to meet me, when the train went slowly over the housetops into Folkestone. How young and handsome she looked in her dark-brown tailor gown and neat brown hat! and what a moment of bliss it was for me when she clasped my hands and gave me one discreet little kiss!

"Are you happy, mother, and are you still fond of me?" I asked, in a breath.

"Yes, to both foolish questions. See, Daisy, have you not a word for——"

She stopped embarrassed, looking at her husband, who came up at this moment, after having sent off his servant to help my maid with the luggage.

"Yes, I have plenty of words for Uncle Ambrose," I said, giving him both my hands. "Gracious! what a grand person you have grown, and ever so many years younger! I think you must have concocted one of those wonderful philters that I have read about in Horace."

"Yes, Daisy, I have drunk of a philter; but not one of those nasty mixtures which wicked witches brew. My philter has been happiness."

"I really half suspect you are a second Doctor Faustus, and that you have made a bargain with the fiend," said I.

"If I had, Daisy, I don't think my consciousness of the compact would prevent my being happy," he answered, smiling at me.

We went straight from the station to the boat, only a few yards, and then we sailed across a summery sea, and then came a long, hot journey—for though we had left cool weather in

England, there was a sultry atmosphere on the other side of the Channel.

We were in Paris in time for an eight-o'clock dinner, and I sat between mother and Uncle Ambrose in one of the prettiest private sitting-rooms in the Continental Hotel, with open windows facing the big lamp-lit square, and the fountains and statues, and the Champs Elysées, in a glittering haze of summer mist mixed with lamplight, and over all the great purple sky flashing with stars so brilliant and so large that they seemed hanging just above our heads.

They both seemed glad to have me with them. They both seemed fond of me. After dinner Uncle Ambrose took me for a walk, and showed me Paris by lamplight, while mother sat and rested, and read the last new book which he had bought for her at the station. There never was a happier girl than I was that balmy September night, hanging on to Uncle Ambrose's arm and devouring Paris with my eyes. We walked as far as Notre Dame, and stood in the quiet, open space, looking up at the great dusky towers, so grand, so old, so rich in saintly and historical images.

He told me all about the building of that mighty cathedral, and how it had slowly risen from its foundations, and grown and ripened into beauty, like a great oak in the heart of the forest, almost as gradually, almost as quietly. And then we looked at the river, and then we walked slowly back to the hotel.

I felt so happy when I went in; but one look at my mother's face, as she sat staring straight before her in the lamplight, dashed all my happiness.

"Clara!" cried Uncle Ambrose. "What is the matter?"

She pointed to the novel she had been reading, which lay open on the table.

"How could you choose such a book as that for me?" she asked reproachfully.

"I chose the book because it has made a great success in Paris. See, ninety-ninth thousand! Isn't that a guarantee that the story is worth reading?"

"It is a revolting story—the story of a murder—in a low lodging-house in the cité—a murder that was never avenged."

"Don't you like murder stories?" I asked. "I enjoy a murder if it is a really good one—a mysterious murder, which keeps the reader wondering all through the book."

"Never talk in that strain, Daisy, unless you want to disgust me," answered mother, more sternly than I ever remembered her

to have spoken to me in her life. "Do you think a crime which desolates a home and wrecks a life—or many lives—is a thing to be talked of in that spirit?"

"Oh, but poets and dramatists would be poor creatures unless they were able to describe great criminals. Look at Macbeth, for instance. Some critics call Macbeth the finest of all Shakespeare's plays, and I really think it is my first favourite among them all."

"Stop, Daisy," said Uncle Ambrose, with his hand upon my shoulder. "Don't you see that your mother is tired and nervous? It is past eleven, and we are to do a great deal of sight-seeing to-morrow. You had better bid us good night."

I kissed the poor pale face, which had changed so sadly since dinner time, and went off to my room, where my maid was waiting for me.

I had shared mother's maid until now, but now I have the undivided service of my good nurse Broomfield, a buxom person of eight and thirty, who has been gradually educating herself into a lady's maid, and who has nothing to do except look after my wardrobe, and brush my hair, and walk out with me sometimes, when I cannot have mother's company.

My head was a little troubled as I laid it on my strange pillow, troubled about my mother's trouble, which seemed more than the occasion accounted for. If I had known then what I know now I should have understood that look of horror in her eyes as she lifted them to her husband's face while she pointed to the open book.

Oh, what a blessing it was not to know! and how I wish Providence had suffered me to remain in happy ignorance, as my mother wished! But there are always officious people in the world to take things out of the hands of Providence; or, at least, it seems so.

We had been nearly a month in Switzerland moving quietly from place to place and thoroughly enjoying the beauty of everything, all the more because of Uncle Ambrose, who was like a walking encyclopædia, telling me all I wanted to know about everything and everybody, talking most delightfully about Voltaire, Rousseau, Gibbon, and all the Lake Leman poets and philosophers, and quoting whole pages of Tyndall on the Alps and Glaciers.

My mother had no more nervous fits after that night in Paris. She seemed thoroughly happy, and pleased with my enjoyment of everything. Sometimes a shade of melancholy would creep over

her at the thought of years ago when she had been in these places with my father, and there were days when she had a listless air, as if she were weary of life, in spite of the love that watched her footsteps and wrapped her round like an atmosphere. I wonder if all husbands are like Uncle Ambrose. There is an intensity in his devotion to my mother which shows itself in every act of his daily life; and yet his affection is never intrusive, it never touches the ridiculous. I think very few people at the hotels where we stopped guessed that they were a honeymoon couple. Mother is silent and reserved amongst strangers, and Uncle Ambrose has always the thoughtful air of a student. At the National, at Geneva, there were some Oxford men who were very much impressed when they found out who he was. I heard them talking about his books one evening in the reading-room when I was looking through the Tauchnitz novels. I felt quite proud to think that the man they were praising was the man who had stooped from his high estate to educate me.

I wonder whether it was for mother's sake—whether he worshipped her from the very beginning, even in my dear father's lifetime, with the same worship that he has for her now—a hopeless, distant love in those days, without expectation or thought of reward. I can but think that it may have been so, that no lesser feeling would have induced so learned a man to devote himself to the training of an ignorant little girl.

It was at Lucerne that the secret of my father's death was revealed to me. It happened only the day before yesterday, and yet I feel as if it was ages ago. I was so occupied with the novelty and delight of this beautiful country until then, that I had not found time to open my diary after I left England; but now I come to the book for relief from my pent-up agony. I have not had one happy moment since that revelation; and yet I have been obliged to appear as happy as ever, for fear my mother should find out what I am brooding upon, and be reminded of the one great sorrow of her life. Oh, what a sorrow it must have been! What an awful haunting memory! It is wonderful to me that she could ever smile again, or take any pleasure of life, or think of anything except that one dreadful fact.

I know now how my father died—why he was snatched away from us without an hour's warning. I know that he was cruelly murdered by an unknown hand; and that his murderer is walking about the earth at this day, undiscovered and unpunished; unless

God's vengeance has fallen upon the wretch in some mysterious way that we know not.

We were at the Schweitserhoff, at Lucerne. The weather was lovely, and we had spent the day on the lake, and in the evening after dinner we all went out to the portico in front of the hotel. There were some Tyrolose musicians playing under the trees by the lake, and I thought of that curious story of Tolstoi's—of the poor wandering musician and the cruel people at the Schweitzerhoff, who listened and applauded, but never gave him a sou. And then the poor creature went strolling about the town, where the teller of the story followed him, to take him back to the Schweitzerhoff and treat him to champagne, much to the indignation of the company in the coffee-room.

I reminded Uncle Ambrose of Tolstoi's story, which we had read together. We were sitting in the deep shadow of the portico, looking out at the moonlit quay, and listening to the Tyrolese musicians, one of them playing upon the Streich-zither while the others sang.

Presently Uncle Ambrose and my mother went for a turn on the quay, leaving me sitting in my dark corner at the back of the colonnade. They asked me to go with them, but I had walked and run about a good deal in the afternoon, at Altdorf and Fluellen, and I told mother I was tired, and would rather stay where I was.

I was sitting in a dark corner, enjoying the music, and unobserved by anybody. There were two rows of people in front of me.

"Do you know who she is?" asked a man sitting very near me, as my mother moved slowly away on her husband's arm.

"Her name is Arden—a very attractive woman, is she not?" returned his companion.

"Decidedly handsome! But don't you know who she is?"

"I only know that the man she is walking with is her husband, and that their name is Arden. I saw it in the visitors' book this morning."

"Didn't you notice another name bracketed with it? I did."

"What name?"

"Miss Hatrell, the lady's daughter. She is travelling with her mother and her stepfather. Mr. and Mrs. Arden have only been married a month. I saw the marriage in the *Times*."

"But what about Miss Hatrell?"

"Do you mean to say the name has no association in your mind?"

"Not the slightest. I never knew any Hatrells, so far as I can remember."

"Perhaps not, but I don't think you can have forgotten the mysterious murder in Denmark Street, St. Giles's, which everybody talked about six or seven years ago. The man murdered was a country gentleman who had gone up to London to cash a big cheque in order to pay for an estate he was buying. He cashed the cheque in Pall Mall, but he never reached Lincoln's Inn Fields with the money. He was intercepted on his way and lured to a lodging-house in Denmark Street, where he was found next day stabbed and plundered by an unknown hand. It was one of those murders which baffle all the endeavours of the police, and bring discredit upon the force."

"Yes, I have a faint recollection of the affair—the Denmark Street mystery, I think they called it. I had utterly forgotten the man's name. Do you say that this Miss Hatrell is a relation of the murdered man?"

"Only his daughter. Mrs. Arden was his widow until a month ago, when she married the man who is walking with her over there in the moonlight. I have some friends at Henley who talk about her. She has a place on the banks of the Thames, where she has lived in retirement since her husband's murder."

"Was it never known who murdered him?"

"Never. The motive was plunder, of course. The murderer got clean off with his booty, in the form of Bank of England notes, which were cashed in the South of France before the bankers in that part of the world had heard of the crime. The murderer got a start of eighteen hours or so before the crime was discovered—just margin enough to allow of his turning the notes into hard cash."

"Were there any arrests made, or was anybody suspected?"

"Oh, as far as that goes, there is no doubt that the man who committed the murder was a foreigner who took a room in the Denmark Street lodging-house for the express purpose of murder. He lured his victim there by the use of a woman's name—the name of some Frenchwoman of whom Hatrell had once been fond. He did the deed unaided, in the broad light of day, and then he locked the door of his room, and went downstairs and out of the house, as coolly as if he had gone home to fetch some implement of his trade and were only going back to his workshop. This, I believe, is the last that was ever seen of him."

"No doubt he is knocking about Europe somewhere," answered the other man. "Who knows? He may be here to-night. The Schweitzerhoff would be a capital resort for a man who was wanted

by the police. The very publicity of the hotel would be his safeguard."

I sat there cold and trembling while they talked, oh! with such callous indifference; as if it mattered nothing that an adored husband and father should be lured away to some horrid den and cruelly murdered. And then the dear face came back to me in all its brightness—the happy smile—the candid gray eyes. The loved voice sounded again in my ears, just as if my father had that instant called to me from the garden. Oh, how could my mother get over such a blow as that? The wonder was not that she had grieved dreadfully, but that she had ever ceased to grieve. And nothing had been done. His death was unavenged; his murderer was walking about the world unpunished. Yes, as that man said, he might be in Lucerne to-night.

I did not cry out, or faint, or do anything to create a disturbance. For a minute or so there was a rushing in my ears, and the pillars of the portico seemed to rock; and then my head grew cool and clear again. But I felt that I could not go on sitting quietly there; and I started up and asked one of the men who had talked about my father to make way for me, and I broke through the double range of sitters somehow, and ran down the steps and away towards the cathedral, and then up the hill at the back of the hotel. I wanted to get away from the crowd, from my mother and Uncle Ambrose, from every one and everything, just to be alone with my thoughts of my dear dead father.

The narrow path up which I went to the top of the hill was quite deserted at this time. I stood on the hill-top alone, looking down at the lighted city, so picturesque in its stillness, the quaint old roofs and gables, and market squares and narrow streets, which it had been such a delight to explore with Uncle Ambrose only yesterday, but which I looked at now with dull, unseeing eyes. Pilatus lifted his snow-crowned head above the further shore of the lake, and over all there was the clear light of the moon, clear yet soft, leaving great gaps of densest shadow, black depths where the lamps twinkled here and there, singly or in clusters of warm red light, which seemed a relief after the coldness of the moon and stars.

I had noticed all these things the night before, when I stood in the same spot with Uncle Ambrose. I noticed them mechanically to-night, while my heart beat loud and fast, with a passionate longing to do something, weak, inexperienced girl as I was, that

should slowly, laboriously, surely lead to the punishment of my father's murderer.

"How is it," I asked myself, "that one murderer escapes, and that another, who seems to leave but the slightest indications to lead to discovery, is arrested within a week of his crime? What is it that makes the chances of criminals so uneven, and how is it that the police, who in some cases seem to exercise a superhuman intelligence, seem in other cases helpless and blundering almost to the verge of idiocy?"

I had heard this question discussed within the last few weeks in relation to a mysterious murder in Liverpool, and I had taken an intense interest in the subject—a morbid interest, Uncle Ambrose told me, when I talked to him about it. He reproved me for occupying my mind with a ghastly story. I reminded him that the story of this murder was no more ghastly than the story of Agamemnon's murder, or of the string of murders in "Macbeth," and that one might as well be interested in real horrors as in fiction. Little did I think then that there would come a day when I should have a stronger reason for brooding upon this ghastly subject.

I stayed on the hill a long time, forgetting everything except the horror that had been made known to me that night—forgetting most of all that my absence would alarm my mother. I was startled at last by the cathedral clock, which began to strike the hour. I counted the strokes, and found that it was eleven o'clock. I had been away from the hotel more than an hour.

I hurried back, and on the way met Uncle Ambrose, who scolded me for going out alone at such a late hour.

"Your mother has been anxious and agitated about you, Daisy," he said. "How came so wise a person to do such a foolish thing?"

"I don't know—I forgot," I said.

"Where have you been all this time?"

"On the hill up there, looking down at the town."

"My dear Daisy, how could you forget that your mother would be alarmed at your disappearance?"

"I forgot everything."

And then I told him what I had heard an hour ago in the portico. I asked him why the cruel truth had been kept from me during all those years? I looked at his face in the moonlight, and saw more trouble there than I had ever seen in my life before.

"It would have been cruel to tell you the truth, Daisy. The

greatest curse of life is the existence of idle chatterers, who must always be babbling about other people's business. If wishes could bear fruit, it would be bad for those men you overheard to-night."

I had never heard such anger in his voice as I heard then.

"God only knows the pains your mother and I have taken to keep this sorrow from you," he said. "We have pledged all who knew you and were about you to silence. We have hedged you round with precautions. And yet, in one unlucky minute, the prurient gossip of a wonder-monger frustrates all our care."

"I am glad I know," I answered. "Do you think I wanted to live in a fool's paradise?—to believe that my father died peacefully in the arms of a friend, when he was brutally murdered? You don't know how I loved him, or you would know better than that."

I was angry in my turn—and now tears came, the first which I had shed since I heard the story of my father's death—tears of mingled anger and grief. I seized Uncle Ambrose by the arm. I was almost beside myself.

"You were his friend," I said, "his closest friend, almost like a brother! Did you do nothing to avenge his death? Nothing, nothing?"

"I did all that mortal man could do, Daisy. I stimulated the police to action by every means in my power. I did not rest till all that could be done had been done. It was in concert with me that your mother offered a reward large enough to set all Scotland Yard on the alert. If the murderer escaped, be assured it was not because his pursuers were careless or indifferent. Had he been a prince of the blood royal the endeavour to solve the mystery of his death could not have been more intense than it was."

"What idiots the detective police must be!" I exclaimed.

"No, they are not idiots, Daisy, though it is the fashion to call them so whenever a notorious criminal evades pursuit. There are some uncommonly clever men among them, and there are some uncommonly clever captures and discoveries made by them. But now and then they have to deal with a criminal who is both clever and lucky, and that was the case with the wretch who murdered your father."

"Tell me all about his death—every detail," I said.

"What good will it do for you to know, Daisy?" he asked in his pleading voice; just as he used to talk to me years ago when I was a child, and inclined to be naughty. "For God's sake, my dear girl, try to forget all you heard to-night. Think of your father only

as you have thought of him hitherto; as one who was taken from you in the flower of his years, and who sleeps quietly in his grave, honoured, loved, and lamented. The manner of his death makes little difference. It was swift and sudden, a merciful death—without deathbed horrors, or prolonged pain. It must have been an almost instantaneous death."

"You know all about it, and I want to know, too," I answered. "If you won't tell me I shall find out the truth for myself. I know the date of my father's death, and I have only to get the newspapers for the following days, and I shall learn all that can be learnt about his murderer, and the circumstances of his death."

"You are obstinate and foolish, Daisy," he said. "It would be far wiser to blot the horror of the past out of your mind for ever. Your father's sleep is just as sweet as if he had perished by the slow and painful decay which darkens the end of life when men live to what is called a good old age. A good old age! as if age and decay could ever be good! I wonder at your want of philosophy. I thought I had trained my pupil better, and that whenever you should come to know the worst your own calm reason would show you that death by assassination is no more dreadful than any other form of death."

"It is more dreadful—infinitely more dreadful—for it robbed me of my beloved father. He would be with us now—he might be with us for long years to come—but for the wretch who killed him. It is easy for you to preach resignation, for you have been the gainer by his death."

I was too angry to think of the cruelty of my words, or of my base ingratitude towards the truest friend I have in the world, after my mother. I could think of nothing but my father's hard fate, and my own most bitter loss.

"That will do, Daisy," said Uncle Ambrose, in a voice that sounded like a stranger's. "So long as you and I live you can never say anything more cruel than that."

"Or more ungrateful," I cried, throwing myself into his arms. "I am a wretch, a thankless wretch."

He soothed and comforted me, assuring me of his forgiveness. He could make every allowance for a heart so tried as mine. Yes, it was a hard thing to have lost so dear a father, so good a man.

"For God's sake don't think that I failed in regard for your father," he said. "Although our ideas of life were so different—he all action and vivacity, I dreamy and self-contained—he was the

best friend I ever had, the man I liked best in the world. Yes, I have gained by his untimely death, gained a pearl beyond price, the one dream and desire of my life. I can never palter with facts there, Daisy. You and I must understand each other and believe in each other, if I am to stand in a parent's place for my dear pupil and friend. There shall be no sophistication on my part. I have told you why your mother and I have laboured to keep the manner of your father's death hidden from you; but now you have discovered so much I will not stand in the way of your knowing all, since it is your wish——"

"It is my wish—my most ardent wish."

"Very well. When we go back to England I will give you the report of the inquest, which will tell you every detail. I will give you a collection of leading articles, which will show you how easy it is to speculate and conjecture and theorize about a crime, and how very difficult it may be to find the criminal. I have all these papers for you to read, and you shall be allowed to read them, but under protest. I know that it is not well for you to brood upon that sad event."

"I shall brood less, perhaps, when I know more," I told him.

And then he implored me to say nothing to my mother about this dreadful past, which had tried her so terribly.

"God knows what would happen if her sorrow were to be brought too vividly back to her by any display of emotion upon your part," he said. "She must never be allowed to talk about that dreadful time. Her life and her reason were both in danger. Child as you were you must have seen what a wreck she was when you went home from Westgate. You must have known how slow she was to recover health and spirits."

I promised him that come what might I would never afflict my mother by any allusion to my father's death; and then once more I pleaded for pardon for my foolish and thankless speech.

"My child, how can I be angry with you?" he said, in his grave and gentle voice, the voice I have loved from my babyhood almost. "What can be more natural than that you should love your father, and regret him, passionately and fondly? Only tell me, dear, honestly, are you sorry that your mother has made my life happy? Are you sorry that she has allowed me to stand in the place of the father you have lost?"

I told him no, a thousand times no. Next to my father and mother, he was the person I loved best upon this earth, and I was

very glad to have him bound to me for all my life as my guardian and friend.

"There shall be no one ever nearer or dearer to me," I told him. "But you must be Uncle Ambrose to the end. I cannot call you father."

CHAPTER IX.

DAISY'S DIARY IN MILAN.

LUCERNE was very gray and dim when we bade it good-bye yesterday morning, the last day of November; but when we had climbed nearer the snow peaks the sun shone out over the beautiful white world above us and the dark lake below, and the rest of the journey to the mouth of the great tunnel was like a journey in fairyland. What could be more exquisite than to go winding upward and upward into the great heart of the mountain, and to look down on village roofs, and winding streamlets, and bridges, and rocky gorges, and vineyards, and gardens, and church towers, even so far below the wonderful iron road that was taking us towards the skies? I felt so sorry when that part of our journey was over; and though I longed to find out what Italy was like, I felt very sad as I sat at the snug round table in the little station, the last Swiss station, and sipped a farewell cup of coffee with mother and Uncle Ambrose.

It was a disappointment after leaving sunshine and blue skies above the Swiss snow-peaks to find Italy gray and rainy, with just that incessant drizzling rain which one has known from one's childhood as the mark of a hopeless wet day, and which has been politely called a Scotch mist. Of all the things I had thought to meet with in Italy a Scotch mist was the last; but there it was, and nothing would have reconciled me to the grayness and the rain except the red cotton umbrellas, which were delightful, and which made me feel I was in Italy.

Next to the red umbrella, as an Italian institution, came the *berceau*, the verdant colonnade made by vines trained over cane or wire, leafy arcades which I saw in every garden, and in front of the humblest houses—sometimes on the tops of the houses, sometimes forming a loggia on the upper story. The vine leaves were turning yellow and red with the touch of autumn, but they were still green enough for beauty. The bell-tower in every village church was another sign that we were in Italy; and then by-and-by we came

upon the great dark blue lake lying in the bosom of mist-wreathed hills, and mother and I agreed that but for the bell-towers, the *berceaux*, and the red umbrellas of the peasantry, we might have fancied we were in the Trossachs.

And so, as Mr. Pepys says, to Milan, where we steamed into a great metropolitan-looking terminus, and saw Cyril waiting for us on the platform in the glare of the electric light.

He had grown tired of the North, and had written to his father to propose joining us on our journey to Venice, and with this intention he had made his way to Milan, amusing himself here and there as he came, exploring odd nooks and out-of-the-way spots.

He was looking in high health and very happpy, I thought, as he stood smiling at us in the electric light.

"Well, wee modest flower," he said, addressing me in his usual grand manner, after he had shaken hands with mother and Uncle Ambrose. "Welcome to the ancient kingdom of Lombardy. I wonder if you are as enraptured with Italy as you were before your foot had ever touched the soil? I'm afraid upon such an evening as this you'll find Milan uncommonly like Glasgow."

He took us to a fine roomy landau which he had engaged for us, and we left the man and the maids to look after the luggage, and drove off to the Hotel de la Ville, in a narrowish busy-looking street that might have been Fleet Street or the Strand for anything distinctive that I could see in it under that gray rainy atmosphere. Yes, there was one superiority over Fleet Street in spite of the rain and the mud, and that was the electric light, which filled all the city of Milan with its silvery radiance, so that the night was like unto the day.

The head waiter at the hotel told us that there had been three weeks' rain, and I found afterwards that this fertile plain of Lombardy, which I am told is very lovely in spring, owes its chief beauty to the damp and cloudy winter climate.

At any rate I was in Italy, and the very idea was full of delight. I kept telling myself that this was Italy, and trying to cheat myself into brief forfetfulness of the dreadful story on which my mind had been fixed ever since that night at Lucerne. It was to be only brief forgetfulness, for I had resolved to confide all my troubles to Cyril, to whom I could talk freely.

Oh! what a painful effort it had cost me to keep my feelings hidden from the dear mother, with whom till now I had shared every thought and every fancy! In spite of my endeavour to seem

happy and untroubled, she discovered that there was something wrong, and I had to pretend that young-lady-like ailment, neuralgia, from which I am thankful to say I have never suffered. I was conscience-stricken at the thought of my own falsehood when I saw mother's anxiety. She almost insisted upon calling in a doctor, so I had to reassure her by a prompt recovery. I told her the pain was quite gone, but that the climate had rather a depressing effect upon my spirits. This accounted for my talking very little, instead of talking almost incessantly; and this accounted for my sitting in my corner of the carriage, thinking, thinking, thinking, all through that long railroad journey.

I have always liked Cyril, but I never felt so glad to see him as I felt that night at Milan. I wanted so much to talk to a man who knew the world, and a man to whom I could express myself freely, without any fear of inflicting an unpremeditated wound, as I had done in the case of Uncle Ambrose. So after dinner I asked Cyril if he would take me for a walk, and show me the outside of the cathedral; to which request he assented very good-naturedly, only bargaining for a cigarette in the hall before we started. We had dined in our sitting-room on the first floor, and we all went down into the gay-looking vestibule after dinner, and took our coffee at a little table, in a corner where we could look on at the people coming in and going out.

Was mother happier than I? Had she forgotten the dead? Those were two questions which I could not refrain from asking myself as I sat by her side that evening, our first evening in Italy. She looked so young and so beautiful that night, in her calm, reposeful attitude, as she sat slowly fanning herself and idly watching the shifting groups in the spacious vestibule. Her brown brocade gown, with its sable collar and bordering, made her look like an old picture. The aristocratic-looking head, with its crown of dark auburn hair, rose out of the deep soft fur like a lily out of a cluster of leaves. Her hazel eyes seemed to have sunlight in their clear darkness. She looked utterly calm and happy; and assuredly if a husband's devotion could make a wife happy her happiness was well founded. Such gentle deference, such chivalrous affection must be very rare in the history of men and women, if I may judge by the stories of domestic misery that I have heard, and by the few married couples I have known.

There is the dear old Rector, for instance, a delightful being for all the world outside the Rectory, but a pestilence to his wife.

There is Dr. Tysoe, always grumbling about his dinner, and wanting to have the cook discharged instantly if a joint is not roasted to a turn. Then there is Dr. Talbot, a man in whom Society delights, but who is always irritable or out of spirits at home; whose sudden appearance in the drawing-room casts a cloud over his family, and seems palpably to chill the atmosphere.

No, in my brief experience I never saw the perfect and ideal husband whom we occasionally meet in a novel, till I saw my mother's husband, Uncle Ambrose.

He is not a bit like Rochester, though he has Rochester's commanding intellect. He is more like a spiritualized John Halifax; and I who have known him all my life know that his placid temper is no honeymoon garb to be put off by-and-by. I who have known him all my life know that he is the most delightful companion, the most unselfish and sympathetic friend—a man always abreast with every intellectuul movement of the age, a man rich in resources, keenly interested in art and science, as well as in dry learning.

There never was a son less like his father than Cyril. He is as much unlike in temperament as he is in person. Uncle Ambrose is all thought, Cyril is all action. He is like my own dear father in his energy and movement, as full of life and activity as if there were quicksilver in his veins. He is eager for knowledge; but he loves best the knowledge that comes to him from the lips of men; the knowledge that can be gained amidst the life and movement of the big, busy world. Cyril is not the least like anybody's ideal. He would never serve as a model for the hero of a novel.

Yet in spite of the absence of the poetic element, Cyril is very nice, and one cannot help liking him. He sings delightfully. He is always gay and bright; although he affects to have exhausted every pleasure. He is the most inquisitive person I ever met with —always wanting to know everything about everybody.

He is generally considered good-looking, indeed some people insist upon calling him handsome. He has gray eyes in which the light sparkles and dances when he is amused at anything. He has curly brown hair—hair which curls obstinately, however closely it is cropped, very pretty hair, hair which suggests the poetical temperament, a suggestion which Cyril certainly does not realize. He has a sharp, inquisitive nose; he calls mine tip-tilted, and I am sure his has the same upward inclination—but it is a very nice nose all the same, and it has no affinity to the snub or the pug. He is tall and slim, with moderately broad shoulders, and quick, active move-

ments, and he always dresses well. I believe he considers himself an authority upon dress, and he is certainly very severe upon other people.

I took his arm, and we went out into the drizzling rain. There were a great many shops open, late as it was, and they looked lovely; but my mind was too full of serious things for me to be easily distracted.

"Take me first to look at the cathedral," I said; "and then take me into some solitary place where we can talk quietly."

"Gracious, madam, what an alarming request!" he cried. "I think we had better get the sacristan and his keys and go down into the crypt where St. Charles Borromeo lies in his silver shrine. I cannot conceive any other place solemn enough to match the solemnity of your tone."

"Don't laugh at me, Cyril; I am very serious."

He looked down at me, with a startled, inquisitive air.

"What is it, Daisy?" he said very sharply, almost angrily; "a love affair?"

"No, no, no. There is nothing further from my thoughts to-night than love."

"I am glad to hear it. When a young lady is an heiress, and something of a feather-head into the bargain, one is easily alarmed."

"You have no right to call me a feather-head, when your father, one of the cleverest men in Europe, has educated me," I said indignantly.

"My dearest child, book-learning is not wisdom," he answered; "and a grain of worldly knowledge is sometimes more useful than a pound of book-knowledge. I know that you are far in advance of the average girl in your acquaintance with European literature. I know that you have read more than some college dons, and that you are an excellent linguist, and altogether deeply, darkly, beautifully blue. But all the same, you have not learnt the alphabet of the world in which you live. All that kind of knowledge has yet to come."

"It is a hateful kind of knowledge," I said angrily.

"My child, you can't get on without it," he answered, with his superior air.

We were in the great open place in front of the cathedral, by this time, and I stood breathless with wonder, looking up at that matchless building. I have been told since that the exterior, which looked so lovely in the bright white light, against a background of

dull gray, is over rich in decoration, that those innumerable statues of saints and martyrs, angels and archangels, priests and prophets, are a waste of power; but to my uneducated eye there was not a touch of the chisel that seemed superfluous; not a niche or pinnacle that did not seem a necessary part of the vast scheme of splendour.

I told Cyril what I thought, as we walked slowly up and down, surveying the mighty church from different points of view; and then we crossed the square, and he took me through the lofty bright-looking arcade, and then into a quieter part of the city, beyond the great opera-house and Leonardo's statue. Here the houses were large and palatial, and there were no more shops, and very few people walking about.

"Now, Daisy, for this confidence of yours, which is not about love," he said kindly.

"I want you to tell me all you know and all you think about my father's murder," I said.

"What! they have told you, then?"

"Nobody has told me. I heard two men talking about my mother and her first husband."

"And their talk revealed the secret that had been kept from you so carefully. Hard lines!"

"I am glad I know. It was hateful to be kept in the dark—loving my father as I did."

"Dear child, what good can it do you to know?"

"Only this good—that I can look forward to the day when his murderer will be discovered and punished."

"I'm afraid that day will never come, Daisy. A pursuit that failed seven years ago is not likely to succeed hereafter. Your mother offered first five hundred and then a thousand pounds reward for the conviction of the murderer, and some of the sharpest brains in London were engaged in the attempt to find him. They failed ignominiously; and I take it there is only one chance of his being brought to book."

"And that is——"

"His being arrested for some new crime. The cool deliberation with which the deed was done, the quiet way in which the man got off and disposed of his plunder, argues the professional murderer. He may commit more murders in the course of his professional career, and sooner or later his work may be clumsily done, or his luck may change—and then, perhaps, when the rope is round his neck, he may confess himself the murderer of your father."

"Tell me all you know about the man—and the crime."

"My dearest child, I know very little," he said. "Seven years ago I was at Winchester, a careless young scoundrel, thinking more of cricket and football, and of my chances of a scholarship, than of my friends; although I think you must know that I loved your mother and your father next in this world to my own father, and the dear old grandad in Radnorshire. Seven years ago my father was a poor man, and I was ever so much more ambitious, and ever so much more willing to work, than I have been since he came into his fortune. I'm afraid I was a selfish young beggar in those days; but I felt the shock of your father's death very deeply, in spite of my egotism. I was mentally stunned by the blow when I took up the London paper and saw that my father's friend had been murdered, and thought of the desolation in that happy home, the misery of that once happy wife. River Lawn was my ideal home, Daisy. I had never been able to picture to myself a fairer domestic life than that of your father and mother, with my sweet brown-eyed Daisy flitting about in the foreground, like a ray of sunshine incarnate. If you had changed into anything it would have been into a sun-ray. I felt the full force of the catastrophe, Daisy, and I devoured the account of the inquest, but the details have grown dim in my memory. I only know that your father was lured into a shabby lodging, upon some shallow pretence, and there murdered, and robbed of nearly four thousand pounds."

And then he argued with me as my stepfather had argued. He tried to make me think that the history of my father's death was a history which I ought to forget. He used almost the same words that Uncle Ambrose had used at Lucerne when my heart was bursting with grief and indignation. Nothing that either could say had any power to alter my feelings.

Cyril and I walked for a long time in those narrow streets of tall stone houses, with great sculptured doorways, and here and there the glimpse of a garden seen dimly through a vaulted arch. I shall never think of the city of Milan as long as I live without thinking of my father's ghastly death, or without recalling the dreary sense of helplessness that came upon me last night as I walked by Cyril's side and heard his sophistical arguments in favour of oblivion.

To-morrow we go to Verona—city of many memories; and after a day or two devoted to mediæval architecture, we go on to Venice, the dream-city.

Uncle Ambrose has given me half a dozen books about the city

of the Doges to read at my leisure, and he is always ready with his own storehouse of information, which seems to me to hold more than all the books that were ever written. He has a memory equal to Lord Macaulay's, I verily believe.

CHAPTER X.

DAISY'S DIARY IN VENICE.

CHARLES DICKENS'S unfailing artistic instinct was never truer than when he described this city as a dream. It is a dream—a dream in marble and precious stones and gold—a dream lying on the bosom of the blue, bright sea—a dream of shadowy streets, where every glimpse of garden seen above a decaying wall which once was splendid, has a look of fairyland. Oh! those little bits of greenery, an orange tree, an aloe or two, how they *tell* where all the chief beauty of the place is in marble! Uncle Ambrose laughed at me once because I screamed with delight at the vision of a boughy orange tree nodding over an angle of wall in one of those narrow canals, where the sun hardly enters. The green leaves and waving branches seemed strangely beautiful amidst that wonder-world of stone.

We stayed for a week at Danieli's, and now we are in an apartment of our own, on the first floor of a palace which is next door but one to Desdemona's house—the house in which she was born and reared, I suppose, and from which she fled with her tawny warrior. She was about my age, I believe, but much simpler and more confiding than I am. I don't think I should ever fall in love with a famous soldier for telling long stories about his fights and his travels, unless he were of a fairly presentable complexion. Poor little Desdemona! I gaze up at her windows every day from my gondola, and wonder which was her nursery window, and which her schoolroom, and whether her mother was a more agreeable person than her father.

I wonder, by the way, what kind of father Shakespeare had. Judging by old Capulet, Brabantio, and one or two other specimens, I should conclude that the woolstapler, glover, or butcher of Stratford-on-Avon was not the most indulgent or amiable of parents. The Shakespearean idea of paternal government is not alluring.

We have been nearly four months in Venice, and have seen the

city under many and widely different aspects. We have had days and weeks of almost summer brightness; we have had intervals of wind and rain and wintry gloom. We have visited every nook and corner of the city, have seen every picture and every shrine, have read and reread, and in some instances understood, our Ruskin. We have explored the neighbouring islands; we have dawdled away sunny days on the Lido; we know the Armenian Convent by heart; and Cyril has reproached me with having established what he calls a system of *flirtage* with the dearest old monk in the world.

How full this region is of memories of Byron, and how prodigious an influence a poet can exercise over the minds of men when he has been lying half a century in his grave! We think and talk of Byron at every turn. In the Doge's Palace, on the Bridge of Sighs; on the Lido, where he used to take his morning ride; on the staircase, where Marino Faliero's noble head rolled down the blood-stained marble, to testify for all time to the ingratitude of nations; in the convent where he spent such happy, innocent hours learning the Armenian language—everywhere one finds the traces of his footsteps or the shadows which his genius clothed with beauty.

Mother is growing tired of Venice—no, that is impossible. Nobody could ever weary of a place so full of loveliness—a place whose every phase is poetry incarnate in marble. She is not tired of Venice; but she begins to weary for home—the familiar house and gardens she loves so well, where every room and every pathway and tree and shrub are interwoven with the history of her happy married life—the days before calamity came upon us. I think I can understand her feelings almost as well as if she and I were, indeed, what we have sometimes been taken to be. I think I can read my mother's heart as well as if she were my sister.

I believe she is happy with Uncle Ambrose. I believe that his society is as delightful to her as it is to me, that his chivalrous devotion gratifies her as it would any woman upon earth. I believe that she is grateful to him and fond of him, and that she has never repented, and is never likely to repent, her second marriage. But all the same do I know that her heart goes back to the old love. I found her a few days ago sitting with my father's photograph on the table before her. She was sitting looking at it, with clasped hands, and tears streaming down her cheeks. She was so absorbed in sad thoughts that she did not hear me enter the room or leave it.

She was talking of River Lawn in the evening; and I fancied that her mind had been dwelling on the old happy days, and that

even in the midst of this beautiful city she felt sad and lonely. She has seemed all at once to grow languid and listless, and to feel no more interest in scenes and buildings whose interest seems inexhaustible to me. I only hope she is not ill. I have questioned her, but she assures me there is nothing the matter. She never was in better health, but she is haunted by visions of the old home where so much of her life has been spent.

"I dreamt of your father's grave last night, Daisy," she said; "I dream of it so often, so often!"

I could not tell her that I too had had my dreams, not of the grave, but of my father himself—horrible dreams sometimes, filled with vague shapes and unknown faces. I had seen my father struggling with his murderer; I had seen the cruel blow struck: but I had never been able to remember the murderer's face when I awoke, though it seemed sometimes in my dream to be a face well known to me.

I can see that Uncle Ambrose is perplexed and uneasy about my mother, and he too seems to have become indifferent to Titian and Paul Veronese.

This being so, I am thrown upon Cyril for society in my rambles and explorations, and he and I go roaming about these delicious waters in our gondola—our own gondola, built on purpose for us, and to be sent to England after our return. How surprised Beatrice Reardon and all the rest of them will be to see us in this mysterious-looking boat, with its swan-like prow and black curtains—a boat which seems to have been designed on purpose for mystery and romance.

My good old Berkshire nurse and maid goes everywhere with me, as a kind of duenna, and exists in a perpetual state of wonder. I doubt if she is altogether awakened to the loveliness of Venice; and indeed she told me the other day that she could not think much of a city which had not one broad street in it. Milan, she admitted, was a fine town, but Verona she considered "a hole," and she considers Venice decidedly inferior to Henley.

"I like the Rialto Bridge, Miss Daisy," she said, "because there's a bit of life there, with the shops and the people, and I like the shops in St. Mark's square, though I should like them better if the shopkeepers didn't stand at their doors and tout for customers, which is an annoyance when one wants to look at things in peace and hasn't no thought of buying anything. But even that isn't up to the Pallerroyal in Paris."

It will be seen, therefore, that Broomfield's tastes are essentially modern. Poor soul, she is so patient and so good-tempered in going about with me to churches and odd out-of-the-way corners that haven't the faintest interest for her. She stands smiling blandly at the pictures and statues, while Cyril and I are deep in our Hare or our Ruskin, peering into every detail.

Cyril is capital. He has an ardent love of art, and, indeed, he seems to like everything that I like.

We have long confidential talks about ourselves and other people, about the past and the future—how strange that one so rarely talks of the present!—as we sit in our gondola, lazily gliding over the sun-lit water, scarcely conscious of the movement of the boat. Sometimes we talk French, sometimes Italian, in which I am anxious to attain facility. It is one thing to be able to read Dante, I find, and another thing to express one's own thoughts easily. The language we talk makes very little difference to Broomfield, who sits poring over her *Daily Telegraph*, or knitting one of those everlasting woollen comforters which she provides for her numerous nephews and nieces. Cyril and I are as much by ourselves as if Broomfield were one of those sculptured seraphim which the Israelites used to have in their houses to symbolise the deity they worshipped.

Cyril's Oxford days are over. He has taken his degree, and has I believe done very well—though he has not swept the board, he tells me, like Mr. Gladstone or Mr. Goldwin Smith, as he intended to do when he was at Winchester. And now he has to think of what he shall do with his life.

"I think I shall go to the Bar," he said, "because a man ought to have a profession of some kind, and I rather like the idea of the Bar—followed in due course by the Bench. And the Bar has advantages for a man who does not want to be a slave in the golden years of youth. The Bar is a profession in which a man can take it easy."

I am afraid Cyril has a slight inclination to idleness—or rather, perhaps, that he has a distaste for any systematic and monotonous work. He is far too active and energetic to waste his days in laziness, but he likes to occupy himself according to the caprice of the hour; and then no doubt he is influenced by the knowledge that his father is a rich man and he an only child.

We were talking the other day about Uncle Ambrose's fortune, and his almost eccentric indifference to wealth, which would have been such a delightful surprise to most men in his position.

"I found out a most extraordinary fact connected with my father's inheritance," said Cyril, "a fact which reveals an indifference that is really abnormal. An American I met at Oxford got into conversation with me about my connection with America, through my father's kinsman. He told me that old Matthew Arden, of Chicago, died early in April, '72, and that as his property was all of a most simple and obvious character, my father must have passed into possession of it within a month or two after his death. Now, I distinctly remember that the first I heard of the change in our circumstances was on All Saints' Day, when I went home from Winchester for twenty-four hours' holiday. My father told me then that a great-uncle, with whom he had kept up an occasional correspondence, had lately died in America, an old bachelor, and a man of considerable wealth, accumulated in trade, and that he had appointed my father residuary legatee. I was a great deal more excited by the change from poverty to wealth than he was. I never saw a man so unmoved by the idea of large means, or so indifferent to the things that money can buy. That indifference has never been lessened; but I believe now that he has a wife and daughter to think about he will take more pleasure out of his wealth and spend money royally. I hear of a house in Grosvenor Square, which has been bought, and is being renovated in the Adamesque style we are all so fond of."

"A house in town would be rather nice," I said, "but I hope Uncle Ambrose does not mean to take us too much away from Lamford. That is the home I love."

"In spite of its sorrowful associations?"

"Yes. I don't want to forget my father. I think to try and forget the loss of one we love is only a selfish way of pleasing ourselves at the cost of our dead. We owe a duty to our beloved dead—the duty of long remembrance."

I had heard a good deal about the house in Grosvenor Square, and had seen sketches of the rooms and their decoration. There were to be occasional departures from the Adamesque character, notably in the hall and staircase, and the room on the half flight. These were to be Moorish, with a good deal of perforated sandalwood and Oriental drapery. I heard my mother discussing the colouring and decoration with Uncle Ambrose, and I was often called into council; but I was just now too completely steeped in the loveliness of Venice to take a very warm interest in any London house. What I sighed for was one of those fifteenth-century palaces

which I saw given over to business purposes, manufactories for carved furniture or Venetian glass, store-houses, show-rooms, work-shops—palaces in which painters like Titian had lived and worked, palaces where the walls still show the armorial bearings of historic families. Oh! to think that the roof which once sheltered a Doge should ever be vulgarised by trade.

Cyril laughs at my horror of trade, and reminds me that Venice, in the days of her greatest splendour, was a city of traders, and that now she is dependent on reviving commerce for her resurrection from poverty and decay.

Yesterday Cyril and I had a grand excursion all to ourselves, or with only my duenna Broomfield to make a third; dear old Broomfield, who always looks the other way when we are talking confidentially. I dare say she wonders what we can find to talk about—first in one language and then in another. Cyril's Italian is of the poorest quality, by the way, and very limited in quantity, but he pretends that he likes to hear me talk, and he pretends to understand me. Our chief confidences, however, are in Freneh, a language in which he is quite at home. Indeed, here it is I who am at fault, for to tease me he often persists in talking Parisian, which is quite a different tongue to the French in which Racine and Boileau wrote.

We started early, on a morning that was more like June than February. We had our own gondola, and our two men, looking deliciously picturesque in their black livery and yellow silk scarves. They are both dear creatures, and have become a part of our family. Paolo is a bachelor, and he is to accompany the gondola to Lamford, and live and die in our service; but Giovanni has a wife and two babies, so we do not import him. It will be an agonising moment when I have to bid him good-bye. I save my dessert every night after dinner, and give it to him next morning for his *bambini*, and his face becomes one broad grin of delight when I hand him my little offering. One could not venture upon such childishness with a Thames waterman, whose only idea of kindness from his superiors begins and ends with beer.

We had a most delightful picnic-basket, enough for the whole party, and we were to go to Torcello, and to be free till sunset. Oh, how like a fairy tale it was to go gliding over that blue lagoon, passing Murano and its chimneys, and Burano and its lace factory, and gliding on and on by willow-shaded banks till we came to all that is left of the mother city of Venice!

We landed in a narrow creek, among sedges and alders, and long rank grass, and I could have almost thought I was in a back-water at home; but within a few paces of our landing-place stood the octagonal church of Santa Fosca, and the museum which calls itself a Municipal Palace, and just behind them the cathedral, very plain of aspect outside, but grand and beautiful within.

After a very conscientious visitation of the two churches, and a rather superficial examination of the marble relics in the museum, we went in quest of a picturesque spot for our picnic; and having found a bower of alders on the edge of the meadows, where the cattle were feeding quietly in the sweet, flowery grass, on ground that was once the city of Torcello, we lunched as it were *tête-à-tête* with the Adriatic; for in front of us we could see nothing but the bright blue waters and the painted sails of some fishing-boats, shining crimson, and purple, and orange in the noonday light. We lingered long over the delicious meal, in air that was far more exhilarating than the champagne which Cyril persuaded me to taste, and which he himself drank with much gusto.

I told him that I thought it a horrid thing to see a young man drinking champagne, and pretending to be a severe judge of the particular vintage. I considered such a taste odiously suggestive of some overfed alderman, feasting in the city.

"You will be taking turtle next," I said.

"Why, you silly puss, we often have turtle at our lunches in Tom Quod," said he. "Do you suppose we wait for grey hairs and red noses before we learn to appreciate the good things of this life? An undergrad. is as good a judge of turtle and champagne as any alderman who ever passed to the luxuries of Mansion House through a long apprenticeship to boiled beef and beer."

We sent Broomfield off to find our gondoliers, while we two wandered along the edge of that verdant shore, with our feet almost in the sea.

"Now we have lost sight of the churches, we might almost fancy ourselves on a desert island," said I.

"I only wish the fancy were true," said he. "I should revel in a spell of summer idleness on a desert island; if we had only enough to eat."

"That last condition takes the poetry out of the whole thing," answered I.

"Oh, but you would not have us left to starve until we began to look at each other and wonder which bit was the nicest."

"Or the least nasty. No, that idea is too awful; it is one of the dreadful mysteries of human degradation that we can never understand till we are brought face to face with Death. Oh, it is so dreadful to think that the mere blind clinging to life can change men into wild beasts. And yet the thing happens. You have filled me with horror by the mere suggestion."

"Daisy, you have too vivid an imagination. You look at me as if you saw the potentiality of cannibalism depicted in my countenance. You and I will visit no island more savage than Prospero's, and there it seems there was always enough to eat."

"Prospero was an enchanter, sir."

"And Miranda was an enchantress—for Ferdinand, at least. Over him she flung earth's most potent spell. Will you be my Miranda, Daisy?"

We were standing on that quiet shore, the waves curling, azure and emerald and silvery bright, up to our very feet. We were as much alone as Ferdinand and Miranda can ever have been on their enchanted isle, and—he had the supreme impertinence to put his arm round my waist.

I believe that kind of thing has happened to Beatrice Reardon almost as often as the toothache; and my cousin Flora has told me that it is sometimes done at dances, in a conservatory where there are palms and tree-ferns, after supper; but such a thing has never occurred to *me*, and it took my breath away.

"Be my Miranda, Daisy," he went on, in such a charming voice that I forgot to be angry with him, or at any rate forgot to express my indignation. "Let me be your Ferdinand, and all the world will be my enchanted island. It is the fairy who makes the spell."

"I don't quite follow your meaning," I said, stupefied by amazement at his audacity.

"Oh, Daisy, what a horrid thing to say!" he exclaimed, evidently hurt. "I thought you were romantic and full of poetry, and you answer me as if you were made of wood."

He took away his arm from my waist in a huff. I believe if he had left it there any longer he would have given me an angry pinch. His whole countenance changed.

"I can't quite understand you, Cyril," I said very meekly. "I thought you and I were to be brother and sister."

"You know you thought nothing of the kind, Miss. You refused to accept my father as a father, or to call him by that name. You told me very distinctly on the wedding-day that I was not to have

the privileges of a brother, and I replied that I had no desire to stand upon that footing. And now that the happiest months of my life have been spent with you; now that I am over head and ears in love, you pretend not to understand, you make believe to be stupid and apathetic. It is very cruel—more cruel than words can say—if you have been fooling me all this time."

I don't know exactly what I said after this. I think I must have apologized for my stupidity, for he certainly forgave me, and put his arm round my waist again, and kissed me, not in the boisterous sort of way that he kissed me in the carriage after mother's wedding, but gently, and even timidly, so that I could not find it in my heart to be angry.

"Are these my Miranda's lips?" he asked; and I think I said that it might be so if he pleased. And then we went slowly, slowly, slowly back to the creek where we had left the gondola; and I believe we were engaged.

Broomfield looked at us in a most extraordinary way when we took our seats opposite her, as if she really guessed what had happened, which was hardly possible. Our dear good men had eaten an enormous luncheon, and they sang their delightful songs all the way back to Venice.

The sun soon began to steep everything in gold—islands, water, distant mountains, and the wonderful city towards which we were going, and the painted sails of the fishing-boats, and the clouds floating in the azure sky—azure that changed into opal—gold that changed to crimson, as the bell-tower of St. George the Greater rose out of the level tide, and the lamps on the Piazza began to gleam like a string of diamonds.

Cyril is a very impetuous person, and before we sat down to dinner he had told Uncle Ambrose and mother that he and I were engaged, and that he would not forfeit that privilege to be the Doge—if the Ducal power of Venice were to be revived to-morrow. Late in the evening mother came into my room and sat with me for nearly an hour by the wood fire. She told me that nothing would please her better than that Cyril and I should love each other well enough to take upon ourselves the most solemn tie this earth knows. Her seriousness made me very serious, and almost frightened me.

"I am pleased that you should be engaged even earlier than I was, Daisy," she said, "and that you should not be hardened and

spoilt by the experience of the world, where girls learn to be selfish, and vain, and self-seeking. I am pleased that you should be engaged to your first lover, in the very freshness and dawn of your life. It is too early to think about marrying, but a year or two hence——"

"Oh, not for ever so many years," I cried. "Pray don't talk about getting rid of me. I want to stay with you, mother. You are all in all to me. You are not tired of me, are you?"

"Tired! No, my darling. It will be a sad day for me when my bright bird leaves the home-nest; but I married very young, Daisy, and my wedded life was all gladness. An engagement should not last too long, even when the lovers are as young as you and Cyril. Two years will be quite long enough. In two years you will be nearly twenty."

"That sounds dreadfully ancient," said I; for indeed it seems that one has done with youth when one is out of one's teens. Mother gave me her small pearl necklace on my thirteenth birthday, and I was so proud of myself, and thought myself quite a personage because I was in my teens; and now here she was talking coolly about my soon being twenty, and old enough to be turned out of doors.

"Two years will be no time," I told her. "I would rather be engaged for ten, so that I may stay at River Lawn with you."

"Who knows, dearest, if you need ever leave River Lawn," she answered sweetly. "I have always thought the French much wiser than we in their domestic arrangements, because they are not afraid to keep their children under the family roof when they are married; and thus the bond of parentage grows stronger instead of weaker, and the little children of the third generation grow up at the feet of the old people. I have heard Englishmen say that this plan can never succeed with us; and, if so, one cannot help thinking that there must be some want of affection in the English heart. Now, in your case, Daisy, there is every reason that your married life should be spent in your mother's home, since you are to marry my stepson."

"Dearest, dearest mother," I exclaimed, giving her a hug which would have done credit to a young she-bear, "how sweet and how wise you are! I am very glad I accepted Cyril. I see now that he is just the very best husband I could have chosen."

"My darling, how lightly you talk," said mother, almost reproachfully. "Your stepfather and I are naturally pleased that you and

Cyril should have chosen each other; but that is not enough, not nearly enough. Nothing is enough unless you love him truly and devotedly, with your whole heart and mind, as I loved your father."

"I suppose I like him as well as I could like anybody," I answered, rather frightened at her grave looks and earnest words.

"Liking is not enough."

"Well, perhaps I love him. I know I have been very happy with him ever since we came here—so happy as to forget—every idea of sorrow or trouble in the world," I said, checking myself confusedly; for the thing that I had forgotten more than I ever thought I could forget was the dark story of my father's death. "I have been quite abandoned to happiness, but I don't know how much Venice may have had to do with that, and whether I shall care quite as much for Cyril when we get back to Lamford."

"My love, be serious," urged mother, looking painfully grave.

"Seriously then I believe I love him as well as I shall ever love anybody."

"Daisy, you talk like a coquette, and not like an earnest woman."

"Dearest, don't be shocked with me. It all seemed like a dream or a fairy tale to-day, when Cyril and I stood on the beach in the sunshine, with the waves making music at our feet. If you had heard how lightly he asked me to be his wife—indeed he never once mentioned the word—you would not wonder that I am inclined to speak half in jest about this solemn business. Let us take the situation lightly, mother, and if after a year or two we should happen to grow tired of each other, why, we can apologize, and drop back into the position of brother and sister."

"No, Daisy, that will not do—there must be no engagement—there must be no semblance of a bond between you—unless you and he are both sure of your hearts. *No hay burlas con el amor.* Good night, dear. Pray to God for guidance. Remember marriage means for ever. As a bond or as a stigma it marks a woman's life to the end."

I felt miserable after she had left me; but I did what she told me to do. I knelt down and prayed to be guided and led in the right way—led to choose the fate that should be best for my own happiness, and for my mother's. The thought that I need never leave home if Cyril were my husband, made him seem to me the most perfect husband I could have.

Scarcely had I risen from my knees, when I heard the distant dip of oars, and the music of a guitar and a couple of mandolines,

accompanying the song Cyril and I are so fond of. The sounds came nearer, slowly growing out of the still night—the melodious plish-plash of the oars, the silvery tinkling of the mandolines, the deeper tones of the guitar, and a fine baritone voice which I fancied I knew.

"Will they pass, will they stay?" I asked myself, throwing open my window, and hiding myself behind the velvet curtain, where I could see without fear of being seen.

The moon was near the full, and all the palaces upon the opposite bank were bathed in silvery light, and along the broad open canal a gondola came gliding, lit with coloured lanterns, which danced and trembled in the soft breeze. It came nearer and nearer, till it stopped under my window, and then the mandolines and guitar played a familiar symphony, and the voice I knew very well began Schubert's "Gute Nacht."

He—it was Cyril, of course—sang the serenade beautifully. Music is one of his greatest talents, inherited from his mother; for I doubt if Uncle Ambrose could distinguish "God Save the Queen" from "Robin Adair."

He sang that lovely melody to perfection, or it seemed perfection on the moonlit canal, with those fantastic Chinese lanterns trembling in the soft, sweet wind. I feel assured it was on just such a night as this that Desdemona eloped with her Moor.

When he had sung the last notes and the mandolines had tinkled into silence, he stood looking up at my window, as if he were waiting for some token of approval.

What Desdemona would have done under the same circumstances floated upon me in an instant. I crept to the mantelpiece and chose a lily from the vase of flowers, and, still hidden by the curtain, flung it out of the window.

He caught it very cleverly; and then, after a pause, the oars dipped, and the mandolines began to play the serenade from "Don Pasquale," and the gondola moved slowly, slowly down the canal, he singing as it went.

I wonder if the other inhabitants of Venice considered him a nuisance? There was a man at the table d'hôte at Danieli's who called Venice "a smelly place"—that was *all* he had to say about the most enchanting city in the world. Such a man as that would be sure to object to a serenade.

Cyril and I were solemnly engaged this morning. We were plighted and pledged to each other for life, and when we marry we

are to have our own suite of rooms in Grosvenor Square, the whole of the third floor, which is to be decorated and furnished according to my taste. This means that Cyril and I are to choose everything; for, of course, I should not be such a selfish wretch as to choose without deferring to him.

At River Lawn we are to have the east wing, and mother will build more rooms if ever we fancy we want them. And the gondola is to be ours—the gondola in which Cyril sang last night.

I feel as if the gondola were a personal friend.

CHAPTER XI.

A WOMAN WHO MIGHT HAVE BEEN HAPPY.

GILBERT FLORESTAN, who came of age a few months before Robert Hatrell's death, was still a bachelor. He saw his twenty-eighth birthday approaching, and he saw himself no nearer matrimony than when he was twenty-one. His life in the interval had been eventful, and he felt older than his years. He had entered the diplomatic service under the best possible auspices, with family interest and collegiate honours in his favour. He had travelled much, and had spent the brightest years of his youth in vagrant diplomacy, passing from one legation to another. He had loved, and he had suffered; and now, at twenty-eight, having, as he believed, got beyond the passions and illusions of youth, he was established in Paris as an idler by profession, well looked upon in the best society of the dazzling capital, and not unacquainted with the worst.

He was not rich, as wealth is counted nowadays, when hardly any man under a millionaire presumes to consider himself comfortably off. He had bread and cheese; that is to say, landed property which brought him, nominally, two thousand five hundred a year, actually, about seventeen hundred. He was not ambitious. He had lost father and mother before he was fifteen years of age, and he had none but distant relations. The stimulus to effort which paternal pride and maternal love might have afforded was in his case wanting. He had no sister to interest herself in his endeavours and to exult in his triumphs. He had no brother to rouse the spirit of emulation in his sluggish temperament. He told himself that he stood alone in the world, and that it mattered very

little what became of him—that he might go his own way, whether to blessedness or to perdition, without hurting anybody but himself.

This sense of isolation had tended towards cynicism. Ho saw the world in which he lived in its worst aspect, and cultivated a low opinion of his fellow-men. His estimate of woman had been of the lowest, since one never-to-be-forgotten April night in Florence, when, standing in a moonlit garden, he heard a woman's careless speech from an open window just above his head—speech which told him with ruthless unreserve that the woman he had worshipped as more than half a saint was an audacious and remorseless sinner.

Never till that night had Gilbert Florestan deliberately listened to a conversation that was not meant for his ear; and on that night he stood beneath the window-sill for less than five minutes. He only waited long enough to be sure that he had not deceived himself—that the speech he had heard was not a delusion engendered of his own fevered brain. There, hidden amidst the foliage of magnolia and orange, he stood and listened to the two who leant upon the cushioned sill above him, looking dreamily out into the night. No, there was no illusion. Those words were real—silvery sweet, though to him they sounded like the hissing of Medusa's snakes. They told him that the woman he was pursuing with all-confiding love was the mistress of another man—that if she were to yield to his prayers and marry him—a question which she was now debating with her lover—the marriage would be a simple matter of convenience, and the lover would not be the less beloved, or the less favoured.

"For thee, carissimo, it would be always the same," said the silver voice; and the music of the waltz in the adjoining ball-room seemed to take up the strain. "Always the same—always the same."

Florestan waited to hear no more. He left the garden of that semi-royal villa, walked straight home to his lodgings in the Via Cavour, packed up the lady's letters—those cherished letters, every one of which—from the tiniest note acknowledging a bouquet, to the longest and most romantic amplification of the old theme, "ho loves me, he loves me not"—he had treasured in a locked drawer, together with every flower he had begged from the clusters she wore on her breast, every stray glove he had hoarded, and the dainty Cinderella slipper for which he had paid more than its weight in gold to her maid. He did not write her a letter. He

would not stoop so low as to give any expression to his anger or his scorn. He had been deceived, that was all. The woman he loved had only existed in his imagination. The beautiful face and form which he had ignorantly worshipped belonged to quite a different kind of woman. Perhaps there was no such woman—out of a book—as the woman he had imagined, the woman of transparent soul and noble mind, the only woman he cared to win.

"I know you; good-bye."

Those five words were all the explanation or farewell which he deigned to send her. He wrote them in his bold strong hand upon a sheet of Bath post, and wrapped it round the packet of letters. Then he packed them in another sheet, and sealed them with the seal which had been set upon so many an ardent outpouring of his passionate heart.

Yes, he had loved her, with all the fire and freshness of three and twenty—with all the romantic fervour of a mind fed upon classic Greek, and steeped in Italian poetry. He had come to Florence a romantic youth, he left Florence a *blasé* man of the world; and yet now, five years after, in this bustling cosmopolitan and distinctly modern Paris, the very thought of those old palaces in which he had danced with her, those old gardens where they had sat in twilight and star-shine, moonlight and shadow, thrilled him with the bitter-sweet memory of a delusion that had been dearer than all the realities of his youth.

He had not been at Fountainhead, his birth-place by the river, except for a week or a fortnight at a time, since he came of age and sold the meadows adjoining River Lawn to Robert Hatrell. But although he had been living abroad since he left the University, he had never consented to let strangers inhabit the house in which his father and mother had lived and died, albeit agents had been desirous to find him an "eligible tenant." The house remained shut up, in the care of his mother's faithful housekeeper, and her nephew, a handy young man who helped in the gardens, where expenses had been cut down to the lowest level compatible with the preservation of the beauty of grounds which had been the chief delight of young Mrs. Florestan's life. A woman takes to a garden naturally, as a duckling takes to water, and cherishes it, and watches it, and thinks about it as if it were a living thing. The worship of flowers and shrubs is inherent in the female mind, and a woman who did not care for her garden would be a monster.

The house was old, as old as the Tudors, and it was just one of those places which the modern millionaire would have ruthlessly razed to the ground, or so altered, restored, enlarged, and beautified, as to obliterate its every charm of age and picturesqueness. Florestan was content to leave it alone in all its subdued colouring, quaintness, and inconveniences of construction, telling of a civilization long past, and of a life less pretentious and more domestic. The gardens had all the grave beauty of an honourable old age. Very little money had been spent upon them; but there had been taste and care from the beginning of things, when they who planned them had Lord Bacon's Essay on Gardens in their minds as a new thing, and had known Francis Bacon in the flesh, and talked with him of the trees and flowers he loved.

Vagrant diplomacy had carried Gilbert Florestan very far from the old home in which his ancestors had dwelt from generation to generation; but he kept the image of his birthplace in a corner of his heart, and he would almost as soon have sold his heart's best blood as the house in which his people had lived and died.

Paris suited his cynical temper at eight and twenty; a city through which the whole civilized world passed and repassed; the vestibule of Europe, the playground of America; a city in which a man who only wanted to be a spectator of the life-drama could have ample opportunity to study the varieties of mankind, nationalities, professions, wealth, and penury, beauty, and burning.

Mr. Florestan had a fourth floor in the Champs Elysées, an apartment which he spoke of jocosely as his sky-parlour. Nominally the fourth, it was practically the fifth floor, and the balcony commanded a bird's-eye view of the city, a vast panorama of white walls and gray and red roofs, through which wound the serpentine coils of the dark blue river.

Although the rooms were so near the roof they were spacious and lofty, and were furnished with some taste, Florestan's own belongings—books, pictures, photographs, bronzes, and curios—giving an air of comfort and individuality to the conventional Louis Seize suite of tapestried easy-chairs and sofas, ebony tables and cabinets. The rooms comprised an ante-room, where three large palms and a Turkish divan suggested Oriental luxury, and which served as a waiting-room for tradesmen and troublesome visitors of all kinds; a library, where Florestan dined on the very rare occasions when he dined at home; a small smoking-room adjoining; and a spacious bedroom, with dressing and bath-room attached.

Here Gilbert Florestan lived his own life, received the few intimate friends he cared about, and shut out all the great family of bores. In the polite world of Paris he was known as a well-born Englishman whose commanding presence and handsome face were distinctly ornamental in any salon, and he was welcomed accordingly with Parisian effusion, which he knew meant very little. In the demi-monde he was known as a young man who had outlived his illusions; and in that half world he was a more important figure than in the salons of the great. It must be owned that he had a preference for Bohemian society, with all its accidents and varieties, its brilliant reputations of to-day, its sudden disappearances of to-morrow, its frank revelations, its absence of all reserve.

He painted cleverly, in a sketchy style, after the manner of the Impressionists, and he was very fond of Art. Music and the Drama had also an inexhaustible charm for him, and he loved those out-of-the-way nooks and corners of the Art world where dwell the men and women whose talents have won but scanty appreciation from the great public, and who have never been spoiled or Philistinised by large monetary rewards.

"Directly an artist gets rich, there is a divine fire goes out of him," said Florestan. "All the spontaneity and the daring which made him great is paralyzed by the greed of gain. He no longer obeys the first impulse of his genius, the *real* inspiration, but he sits down to consider what will pay best; the thing, good or bad, true or false, which will bring him in the most solid cash. He strives no longer to realize his ideal. He studies the market, and paints, or writes, or composes for that. And so dies the divinity out of his art. His genius shudders, and flies the trader's studio; for once bitten with the desire to make money, the artist sinks to the level of the trader. He is no better than the middleman with his shop on the boulevard and his talent for *reclame*."

There is plenty of unrewarded talent in the great city of Paris; and amongst painters and composers who had never reached the monotonous table-land of financial ease, amongst journalists, poets, and vaudevillists, Gilbert Florestan found a little world which was Bohemian without being vicious, but which occasionally opened its doors to certain stars of the demi-monde who would hardly have been received in the great houses of the Faubourg St. Germain, or the Faubourg St. Honoré.

It was at a musical evening on a third floor in the Rue des

Saints Pères that Florestan met two women, in whom he felt keenly interested at first sight. They were mother and daughter. The mother was distinguished looking, and had once been handsome; the daughter was eminently beautiful. He was told that they were Spaniards, natives of Madrid. The elder lady described herself as the widow of a General Officer, Felix Quijada, who died when her only child, Dolores, was an infant. She had migrated to Paris soon after her husband's death, and had lived there ever since. Mother and daughter were both dressed in black, with an elegant simplicity which did not forbid the use of a great deal of valuable lace; and Florestan noted that the elder lady wore diamond solitaire earrings, and the younger a collet necklace, which would not have misbeseemed the throat of a duchess.

Nowhere, however, could diamonds have shown to greater advantage than on the ivory whiteness of Mademoiselle Dolores di Quijada's swan-like neck. Nowhere had Florestan seen a lovelier complexion or finer eyes: but that which attracted him most in the Spanish girl's face was her resemblance to the woman he had loved, the woman who had deceived him, and well-nigh broken his heart. He was interested in her at first sight, and he begged to be introduced to her and her mother.

They received him with cordiality, perhaps because he was the handsomest and most aristocratic-looking man in an assembly where art was represented by long hair and well-worn dress-coats on the part of the men, and by eccentric toilets and picturesque heads on the part of the women. Madame Duturque, the giver of the party, was the wife of a musical man who had written a successful opera twenty years before, succeeded by several unsuccessful ones, and who now made a somewhat scanty living by giving pianoforte lessons and publishing occasional compositions, which he fondly believed to be as good as Chopin's best work, but which were rarely played by anybody except his own pupils.

Clever people, musical or otherwise, liked good-natured little Madame Duturque's parties, and as she did not inquire too closely into the antecedents of any well-mannered and pretty woman who sought her acquaintance, people were met in her salon who were not without histories, and whose past and present existence was in somewise mysterious.

The Spanish beauty and her mother were accidental acquaintances, met at Boulogne-sur-Mer the previous summer.

"Are they not charming?" the little woman asked Florestan,

while her husband, a grim-looking man, with a long, gaunt figure, after the manner of Don Quixote, a long, pale face and long grey hair, was crashing out one of his noisiest mazourkas, in which the *tempo rubato* prevailed to an agonizing extent.

"They are of a very old Castilian family. A Quijada was secretary or something to Charles the Fifth, and I know that they are rich, though they live in a very simple style on a second floor in the Rue Saint Guillaume."

"The young lady's diamonds look like wealth, most assuredly," replied Florestan; "but how comes it that so lovely a woman, and not without a dot, should be unmarried at five or six and twenty? She looks quite as old as that."

"Oh, she has had offers and offers. She is tired of admiration and pursuit. Her mother has talked to me of the grand opportunities she has thrown away. She is capricious—a spoiled child. She does what she likes, and her mother is too fond of her to oppose her in anything. They adore each other. It is a most touching spectacle to see them in their modest interior."

"The mother looks as if she could hate as well as love," said Florestan; "there are some resolute lines about those lips and that prominent chin."

"Quite the patrician air, has she not? and remarkably well preserved too," said Madame, who was proud of her guests and their diamonds.

It was not often such diamonds had appeared on the third floor over a bootmaker's shop in the Rue des Saints Pères.

When the mazourka had finished in a tempest of double arpeggios and a volley of chords, Florestan contrived to get a little conversation with Mademoiselle Quijada.

Her manners were certainly distinguished. She had a reposeful air that contrasted agreeably with the Parisian vivacity which Florestan knew by heart. Her voice was deep-toned and full, and seemed just the one voice to harmonize with the dark and luminous eyes, the somewhat heavy features and marble complexion. She did not strike him as a brilliant or intellectual woman. She suggested a statue warmed into life, but only a dreamy and languorous life, which might at any hour fade again into marble. He had a shrewd suspicion that she was unhappy; that the diamonds and the adoring mother did not altogether suffice for content. There was a pained look sometimes about the lovely, sensuous lips; there was a droop in the sculptured eyelids which

suggested weariness—weariness of life and of the world, perhaps, or it might be that self-contempt which springs from the consciousness of a false position.

He was struck with her and interested in her, but she awakened no tender emotion in his breast, no thrill of passion in his veins. He could never love any woman who was like *that* woman. If ever Love came to him again the divinity must wear a different shape, must be as unlike his false love as one woman can be unlike another.

"I cannot give parties like these pleasant gatherings of Madame Duturque's," said Madame Quijada, by-and-by, when she was bidding him good night, after he had ministered to her comforts by supplying her with a cup of very weak tea and a sugared biscuit; "my daughter and I live in a very secluded way. But we are always at home to a few intimate friends on a Thursday evening, and if you should ever care to drop in upon our seclusion we shall be charmed to see you."

"Be sure, Madame, that I shall not be slow to avail myself of that distinguished privilege," replied Florestan; and his reply meant more than such an answer usually means.

His curiosity, his interest in the side-scenes of life, were aroused by these two women, in whose existence he scented one of those small social mysteries which he delighted to unravel. So beautiful and so elegant a woman as Señorita Quijada would hardly waste her beauty and her jewels upon such a shabby salon as Madame Duturque's, if she were free of more fashionable assemblies. She was evidently outside the pale, and with that hankering after respectability which is the canker-worm of the disreputable, she had greedily accepted the unquestioning kindness of the music-master's wife.

"What do you think of those two?" asked a young portrait painter with whom Florestan was intimate, as the Spanish ladies left the salon.

"I take them to be women with a history."

"Yes, and a dark one. Madame Duturque is an angel of benevolence and simplicity, and all her wandering lights are of purest lustre. She has entertained a good many demons unawares, and I fancy in Madame Quijada she has got hold of a very sulphurous specimen."

"The lady is handsome, and her manners are both dignified and refined."

"So are the manners of a Harpy, no doubt, when you meet one in evening dress. I dare say Clytemnestra was a very elegant woman, and Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth is one of the politest persons in the world of poetry. I think I would as soon trust my life in a lonely Scotch castle with Lady Macbeth as on a third floor in Paris with Madame Quijada, supposing that Madame Quijada had any motive for poisoning me."

"You take a strong view," said Florestan, smiling at his intensity.

"I always take strong views. It is my trade to study the human countenance, and I have made a particular study of those two faces —mother and daughter. The daughter is a victim—the mother is a devil of cunning and unscrupulous greed! Did you see the diamonds they wore? Those are the price of a woman's soul. The daughter has been sold to the highest bidder, and the mother has been the huxter. That woman would do anything for gain."

"I am sorry for Mademoiselle Quijada, if there is any truth in your supposition."

"So am I—sorry almost to tears. She is a stupid, beautiful creature—with very little more intellect than a butterfly; but one is always sorry for a crushed butterfly; sorry for beauty trodden underfoot. She is a woman who might have been happy. Yes, I am sorry for her."

Florestan lost no time in availing himself of Madame Quijada's invitation. He went to the Rue Saint Guillaume on the following Thursday evening, between eight and nine, very curious to see what kind of home the Spaniard and her daughter had made for themselves in the wilderness of Paris.

The house in which they lived was one of the oldest and possibly one of the largest in the old-fashioned street. It was assuredly one of the most gloomy, a house with a stone courtyard, screened from the street by a high wall. To enter the court after dark was like going into an abyss of gloom, through which a lighted window here and there shone faintly, muffled by curtains. For the most part the windows were closed by Venetian shutters, through which no ray of lamplight escaped. The porter who answered Florestan's summons informed him that Madame Quijada's door was on the left side of the second floor landing, but vouchsafed no further attention, and he groped his way upward between the dim lamplight in the vestibule and the still fainter light of a lamp on the first floor. The second floor had only the borrowed light from

below, and he was but just able to distinguish the handle of the door bell.

He was surprised at the door being opened by an elderly man in livery—a very sober livery—who had the air of an old retainer, and who conducted him through a lobby and an ante-room to a spacious salon, where he found the two ladies seated, with a third who sat in a corner somewhat overshadowed by the projecting chimney-piece, a woman of any age between twenty and forty, whose pale face and premature grey hair attracted Florestan's attention. Seldom, if ever, had he seen a countenance which bore in its every line so striking an evidence of past sorrow.

"That woman with the iron-grey hair must have suffered as very few women are called upon to suffer," he told himself.

The beautiful Dolores was seated on a sofa on the opposite side of the hearth, fanning herself with a languid grace which brought into play the beauty of her hand and the brilliancy of her diamond rings, and listening, or pretending to listen, to the animated talk of a man whom Florestan recognized as the celebrated journalist and novelist, François de Lomerac.

A *petit crevé* of two or three and twenty, who sat on a *pouf* near the sofa, lost in admiration of the lady's beauty and the journalist's wit, completed the party.

Madame Quijada received him with much cordiality, Dolores gave him the tips of her fingers, and Lomerac accorded him a condescending nod. A man whose last novel had taken Paris by storm could not be expected to put himself out of the way on account of a casual Englishman.

Florestan took a chair near the lady in the shadowy corner, and and then having talked for a few minutes with his hostess, gave himself up to the contemplation of the room. In his mind surroundings were always indicative of character, and he wanted to see what the nest would say of the birds.

The salon was furnished with stern simplicity, and in a subdued style of decoration and colouring that testified to the refinement of the person who had planned and arranged it. The Louis Seize armchairs and sofas were covered with old tapestry, in greenish and grayish tones, softened by age. They looked like furniture that had been brought from some old family home in the country. There were three or four small tables, a secretaire in old walnut, an Indian screen, and several vases filled with choice flowers. Of those bibelots and chinoiseries that ornament the average

drawing-room, there was no trace. Those choice flowers, which at this season must have been costly, were the only embellishment of the somewhat sombre furniture. Chief among them was a clustering mass of white lilac in a vase of richly glazed delf that looked like lapis-lazuli.

The spacious and lofty room with its neutral colouring, and air of a departed century, would have been gloomy without these flowers. They afforded the only touch of brightness and gaiety in the picture.

"An affectation of simplicity with considerable expenditure in superfluities, such as hothouse flowers and diamonds," mused Florestan. "I wonder what it all means? and I wonder what *she* means?" he added, looking at the pale, silent woman with the large soft eyes, and the iron-grey hair.

It might be that Madame Quijada saw his look, for she approached at this moment and introduced him to the silent lady, whom she described as her niece, Mademoiselle Marcet.

"Louise is more than my niece, she is my adopted daughter," she said; "her father and I were brought up together on a small estate in the neighbourhood of Marseilles, and my niece here was born within sight of the Mediterranean."

"Ah, that is the sea, and that is the sunny shore we Englishmen love as well as any spot of earth," said Florestan, addressing himself more to the niece than to the aunt; but the younger woman took no notice of his speech.

"Do you see any likeness between my daughter and her cousin, Monsieur?" asked Madame Quijada.

"Yes, there is no doubt a likeness," answered Florestan; "I can trace it in the form of the brow and in the expression of the eyes."

He waited, looking at Mademoiselle Marcet with a friendly smile, expecting her to speak; and then, keenly anxious to hear her voice, he asked her an unmeaning question.

"Are you fond of Paris, Mademoiselle, or do you still regret the olive woods and pine-clad hills of Provence?"

"I have never left off regretting them," she answered, in a subdued voice, that struck him as full of a vague pathos, as if sorrow had changed all the major tones to minor; "and yet it is so long since I saw them that they seem almost like the memory of a dream."

"And you have never been tempted to revisit the South?"

"No, Monsieur."

"My poor Louise does not travel," interjected Madame Quijada; "she suffered nine years back from a serious illness which shattered her nervous system. She has been obliged to lead a very tranquil life since then. She is our household fairy, the angel of the hearth, an admirable housewife, but she cares very little for the outer world. Except for her morning walk, before we lazy people are up, or to hear an opera now and then, she very rarely leaves home."

"You are fond of the opera, Mademoiselle?" asked Florestan.

"Yes, I love good music wherever it is to be heard, but the opera most of all. It is another world. I forget everything while I am there."

Her face kindled a little as she spoke. The light was not a vivid light, but it was at least an awakening from the dull apathy he had noticed before.

"I should like to send you a box for the opera some night, if you will allow me," he said. "I know some great ladies who are occasionally generous to me, when they don't care about occupying their boxes. May I seize the first opportunity and send you one?"

"I shall be very grateful to you."

He was studying her face while he talked to her. The features were delicate and regular, the eyes were still beautiful; but sorrow had ploughed deep lines about them, and had set its mark upon the broad white brow. Marred as it was by past suffering he liked her face better than her cousin's. That type of sensuous beauty which had held him captive five years ago had lost all charm for him now. He wanted "the mind, the music breathing from the face"—and in Madame Quijada's niece, with her iron-grey hair, lined forehead, and melancholy eyes, he saw a spiritual beauty which enlisted all his sympathy. That idea of a great sorrow suffered in the morning of life, and leaving its indelible mark upon the sufferer, impressed him strongly.

He was floating about among his great ladies in one of the most brilliant salons of Republican Paris on the following evening; but he did not ask any of those luminaries for her box at the opera, preferring to go to the Box-office and pay for one. It was quite true that boxes had been offered to him; but the occasions had been somewhat rare, and he had only put forward that idea in order to lessen Mademoiselle Marcet's sense of obligation. He wanted to give her pleasure, if he could, and he wanted to see more of the curious trio.

He sent the box ticket to Madame Quijada, expressing the hope that she and her daughter and niece would attend the next representation of Gounod's Faust, which was fixed for the following night. The lady had told him that she seldom went out in the evening, and he therefore counted on finding her disengaged. He added that he should have the honour of visiting their box in the course of the performance. He had secured a stall, so that he should not appear to have offered the box to the beautiful Dolores with the idea of exhibiting himself in her company for the whole evening; but the precaution was wasted so far as Dolores was concerned, for Madame Quijada's daughter was not in the box, when he looked up from his place in the stalls to see how it was occupied.

Madame Quijada was in the place of honour, looking dignified and distinguished in her Spanish mantilla, fastened with diamond stars, and beside her, simply dressed in a black gown and a Marie-Antoinette fichu, sat Louise Marcet, attentive and absorbed, evidently drinking in every note of the overture.

He had scarcely time to wonder at Mademoiselle Quijada's absence when some one in the next row said, "How do you do, Florestan?" and he was startled at finding his River Lawn neighbours seated exactly in front of him.

Mother and daughter were sitting side by side, the girl in her simple white gown, with a bunch of Parma violets on her breast, the mother in dark gray velvet and sapphires, placidly beautiful, with Titianesque eyes and hair, assuredly one of the loveliest women in that assembly, albeit her charms were in their summer maturity and not in their vernal freshness. It is not granted to many women to be perfectly beautiful at eight and thirty, but it had been granted to Ambrose Arden's wife, and her husband's heart thrilled with pride as he noted Florestan's admiring look, a look which passed over the daughter to linger on the beauty of the mother.

Florestan's glance went back to the daughter presently, and he saw that she too was lovely, with a loveliness which echoed every note in the mother's beauty, only the lines were less developed and less definite, the colouring was less brilliant. He looked from the girl to the young man beside her, and recognized Cyril Arden, whom he had not seen for some years.

There had never been anything approaching intimacy between Florestan and the family at River Lawn; but there had been acquaintance and exchange of civilities from the commencement

of the Hatrells' residence, when the owner of Fountainhead was an undergraduate, subject to the dominion of guardians. He had thus in a manner seen Daisy Hatrell grow from infancy to girlhood, and he noted the opening flower with admiring eyes. She seemed to him the perfection of English girlhood. Her complexion of lilies and roses, her hazel eyes and auburn hair, realized his ideal of English beauty; albeit, as in her mother's case, the brilliancy of the colouring recalled the school of Titian rather than the school of Reynolds.

He murmured a few words of congratulation to Ambrose Arden, whom he had always regarded as a scholarly and inoffensive person, a mere nonentity outside his library. He wondered much that such a man could have won the heart of such a woman as Clara Hatrell.

He asked if they had just come from Lamford, and was told of their Italian winter.

"We are going back to River Lawn almost immediately," said Clara. "I am longing to be amongst my household gods."

"Even Venice could not make mother false to River Lawn," added Daisy.

"And are not you glad to go home, Miss Hatrell?" asked Florestan.

"Home is always sweet. Yes, I shall be glad to see all the dear old things again—garden, river, books, horses, and dogs, and boats—but Venice was simply intoxicating. You know it, I suppose?"

"By heart. There are very few spots in Italy that I don't know. There goes the curtain."

The curtain rose, and Florestan was silent, deferring his visit to Madame Quijada's box till the end of the act. He had looked up once while he was talking to his friends, and had seen that lady's keen black eyes watching him intently, while her niece, wrapped in the music, seemed unconscious of all else, and certainly unconcerned about him. He left his place after the curtain fell and went straight to the box, where the open door suggested that he was expected.

"I am sorry not to see Mademoiselle Dolores," he said, when he had exchanged greetings with both ladies.

"She sends you her best thanks for your courteous invitation," replied Madame Quijada, "but she very seldom goes out in the evening. Our appearance at that good Madame Duturque's was an exceptional event."

"It is a pity that so much beauty should be hidden from the world," said Florestan.

Madame Quijada bowed her acknowledgment of this speech, and returned to the contemplation of the audience. She seemed to know everybody of consequence in that assembly—by sight; but she recognized no one as an acquaintance.

"You were talking to some friends in the stalls just now," she said to Florestan, with her eyes fixed upon the Arden party; "a very handsome woman, with a handsome daughter. They are your compatriots, no doubt?"

"Yes, they are English. The lady is my next door neighbour on the banks of the Thames. She has lately married for the second time."

Louise Marcet followed the direction of her aunt's eyes, and looked down at the stalls, where the two beautiful heads, with rich auburn hair, were conspicuous in a central position. The orchestra was silent just now, and Louise's thoughts were at liberty.

"Is she a great lady in England, a lady of title?" asked Madame Quijada, curiously.

"No, she is the wife of a commoner. She and her husband are well off and of good family, but they are not great people."

"What is the lady's name?"

"Arden. Her daughter is Miss Hatrell."

"Hatrell!"

Louise Marcet repeated the name almost in a whisper. There was something in her tone that startled Florestan, and he was still more surprised on looking at her to find her ashy pale. Her aunt saw the change in her face and rose quickly and supported her to the back of the box, where she moistened her temples with eau-de-Cologne.

"The poor child will be better soon," she said to Florestan; "she has been subject to these swooning fits ever since her illness. Come now, Louise, you are better now, are you not?"

"Yes, I am quite well now. It was nothing."

"Oh, it was very nearly a fainting fit. We have just escaped all the fuss and anxiety of a swoon. What was it made you feel ill—the light and heat, or the excitement of the music?"

"It was the light, perhaps. It gave me a kind of vertigo. And I was so interested in looking at Mrs. Hatrell," she said, pronouncing the name with an accent which somewhat disguised it. "Tell me about her," she went on, turning to Florestan. "She is your friend, you say?"

"Yes, she is my friend."

"And she has married for the second time, lately?"

"Quite lately—as late as last September."

"And she is happy?"

"I suppose so. She has gone through a great deal of trouble, but I conclude that now she has a new husband she has forgotten that old sorrow. Her first husband's death was a tragical one. He was murdered in London, seven or eight years ago, by an unknown hand."

"And has his murderer never been found?" asked Madame Quijada, with reviving interest.

"Never. I fear he never will be."

Louise had resumed her seat, and was gazing at the two fair faces in the stalls, absorbed in contemplation.

"How old is Miss Hatrell?" she asked presently.

"About eighteen."

"Is she amiable?"

"Charming. I have never met a sweeter girl. I have known her from her childhood, but we have not seen very much of each other. I have been a wanderer on the face of the earth, as I think I told you the other night."

"Yes," answered Louise, absently, with her eyes fixed on Daisy's smiling face. "How happy she looks, and how good! Was she fond of her father?"

"Very fond. She was only a child when she lost him, but she was devoted to him and he to her."

"You remember him? You knew him well?"

"Fairly well, and liked him much. He was as frank and open as the day—a man without guile."

"I do not like that other man," said Louise, still looking down at the stalls.

"Which man?"

"The second husband."

"Why not? How can you like or dislike at a glance?"

"I always do. I liked and trusted you at the first glance. I distrust *him*."

CHAPTER XII.

FLORESTAN'S MISSION.

FLORESTAN lunched with Mr. and Mrs. Arden on the day after their meeting at the Opera. It was the lady who gave him the invitation. He had always been a favourite of hers, since the time when he sold the meadow, and earlier, when he had just left Eton for the superior independence of the University; and in this busy Paris, crowded with strange faces, she had been pleased to meet with a familiar face—a face associated with the cloudless years of her first marriage. Everything was dear to her that brought back the memory of that time.

Was she happy with her second husband? No, she was not; unless gratitude and a placid submission to the decree of Fate mean happiness.

She had drifted into this second marriage upon the strong tide of Ambrose Arden's passionate love—a love which had gathered force with each long year of waiting, and which had become a power that no ordinary woman could resist. Such a passion, so exceptional in its patient endurance, its intense concentration, will compel love, or at least the surrender of liberty, and the submission to woman's destiny, which is, for the most part, to belong to some one stronger than herself.

She had submitted to this mastery, and she was grateful for that devoted affection which knew no wavering, which had lost none of its romantic intensity with the waning of the honeymoon. No woman could be heedless of such a love as this, from such a man as Ambrose Arden; and his wife was deeply touched by his idolatry, and gave him back all that a woman can give whose heart is cold as marble. Tenderness, deference, companionship she could give, and she gave them: but the love she had lavished on Robert Hatrell was a fire that had burnt out. It was not in Ambrose Arden's power to rekindle the flame.

Never since the first year of her widowhood had her thoughts recurred so incessantly to the past as they had done since her second marriage. In her life with her daughter, they two as sole companions, something of her girlish gaiety had returned to her. She had become almost a girl again in adapting herself to a girl com-

panion. In her anxiety to keep the burden of sorrow off Daisy's youthful shoulders she had shaken off the shadow of her own sad memories, and had given herself up to girlhood's small pleasures and frivolous interests. But since her marriage—since her chief companion had been Ambrose Arden and not Daisy, a deep cloud of melancholy had come down upon her mind. The image of her first husband had become a ghost that walked beside her path and stood beside her bed. The memory of her happiest years had become a haunting memory that came between her and every interest that her present life could offer.

Thus it was that she had been eager to see more of Florestan, and had asked him to luncheon at their hotel.

This time they were at the Bristol, and it was in a salon on the second floor, looking out upon the Place Vendome, that they received Gilbert Florestan.

Daisy beamed upon him in a white straw hat trimmed with spring flowers, and a neat little gray checked gown, made by one of those epicene tailors who give their minds to the embellishment of the female figure. She had a bunch of lilies of the valley pinned upon her breast—a posy which Cyril had just bought for her in the Rue Castiglione. They had been running about Paris all the morning, Cyril protesting that the great city was a vulgar, glaring, dusty hole, yet very delighted to attend his sweetheart in her explorations, and to show her everything that was worth looking at.

"I hope I have satiated her with churches," he said; "we have driven all over Paris, and have gone up and down so many steps that I feel as if I had been working on the treadmill. We wound up with a scamper in Père la Chaise."

"It was a scamper," exclaimed Daisy. "He would hardly let me look at any of the monuments. They are all mixed up in my mind, a chaos of bronze and marble, classical temples and Egyptian obelisks—Balzac, Rachel, the Russian Princess who was burnt to death at a ball, Desclée, Thiers, Abelard and Héloise. I could spend a long day roaming about in that place of names and memories; and Cyril took me through the alleys almost at a run."

"Why should a girl want to prowl about a cemetery, unless she is a ghoul, and is mapping out the place in order to go back there in the night and dig?" Cyril protested, with a disgusted air. "I would rather have to stand and wait while you looked at all the shops in the Rue de la Paix."

The luncheon was a very lively meal, for both Cyril and Florestan

were full of talk and vivacity, and Daisy talked as much as they let her, leaving Arden and his wife free to look on and listen. These two had spent their morning together among the second-hand bookshops on the Quai Voltaire, where the scholar had found two or three treasures in sixteenth-century typography, and where the scholar's wife had hunted for herself among volumes of a lighter and more modern character, and had selected some small additions to the carefully chosen library at River Lawn, a collection which had been growing ever since Robert Hatrell's death had made her in some measure dependent upon books for companionship.

After lunch Florestan suggested a pilgrimage to St. Denis, and offered to act as cicerone, an offer which Daisy accepted eagerly; so a roomy open carriage was ordered, and Mrs. Arden, her daughter, and the two young men set out for the resting-place of Royalties, leaving Ambrose free to go back to the bookshops.

"It isn't a bad day for a drive," said Cyril, as the landau bowled along the broad level road outside the city, "but I am sorry that we are pandering to Miss Hatrell's ghoulish tastes by hunting after graves."

There was more discussion that evening as to how long the River Lawn party should remain in Paris. They had arrived from Italy two days before, and while they were in Venice Mrs. Arden had been anxious to return to England, and had confessed herself homesick. In Paris she seemed disposed for delay.

"I can't quite understand you, Clara," said her husband. "All your yearning for home seems to have left you."

"I am as anxious as ever to go home; but there is something I want to do in Paris."

"What is that?"

"Oh, it is a very small matter. I would rather not talk about it."

Ambrose looked at her wonderingly. This was the first time since their marriage that she had refused to tell him anything. He did not press the point, however. The matter in question might be some feminine frivolity, some transaction with dressmakers or milliners, which it was no part of a husband's business to know.

Later on in the evening his wife asked a question.

"Does Mr. Florestan know Paris particularly well?"

Cyril answered her.

"He tells me that he knows Paris by heart, and all her works

and ways. He has lived here a good deal, off and on; and now he has established his *pied à terre* in the Champs Elysées, and means to winter here, and to summer at Fountainhead. You will have him for a neighbour, Daisy. I hope you are not going to make me jealous by taking too much notice of him."

He spoke with the easy gaiety of a man who knows himself beloved, and who is so secure in the possession of his sweetheart's affection that he can afford to make a jest of the possibilities which might alarm other men. Daisy first blushed, and then laughed at the suggestion.

"Poor Mr. Florestan!" she sighed, "no father or mother, no sister or brother! Nobody to be happy or unhappy about! What an empty life his must be."

"Oh, the fellow is lucky enough. He has a nice old place and a good income. He is young and clever—and—well—yes—I suppose he is handsome."

Daisy offered no opinion.

"Decidedly handsome," said Ambrose Arden, looking up from the chessboard at which he and his wife were seated.

Clara had never touched a card since the nightly rubber came to an end with her husband's tragical death; but she played chess nearly every evening with Mr. Arden, who was a fine player, and intensely enjoyed the game. His wife played just well enough to make the contest interesting, and then there was for him an unfailing delight in having her for his antagonist; the delight of watching her thoughtful face, with its varying expression as she deliberated upon her play; the delight of touching her hand now and then as it moved among the pieces; the delight of hearing her low sweet voice. This life could give him no greater joy than her companionship. It had been the end and aim of his existence for long and patient years.

Mrs. Arden sent Florestan a telegram next morning, asking him to call upon her as early as he could before luncheon. Her husband was going to attend the sale of a famous library, and she would be free to carry out an idea which she had entertained since her meeting with Florestan at the Opera.

Mr. Arden had not been gone more than a quarter of an hour before Florestan was announced. Cyril and Daisy were sightseeing, and Mrs. Arden was alone in the salon.

She was sitting near one of the windows, with her travelling desk on the table before her.

She thanked Florestan for his prompt attention to her request, and motioned him to a seat on the other side of the writing-table.

"I am going to ask you to do me a great favour, Mr. Florestan," she said very seriously, "although our friendship has been so interrupted and so casual that I have hardly any claim upon you."

All that was ardent and frank and generous in the man who affected cynicism was awakened by this deprecating appeal, and perhaps still more by the pathetic expression of the soft hazel eyes and the faint tremulousness of the lower lip.

"You have the strongest claim," he answered eagerly. "There is nothing I would not do to show myself worthy to be considered your friend. If we have not seen very much of each other we have at least been acquainted for a long time. I remember your daughter when she was almost a baby. I remember——"

He checked himself, as he was approaching a theme that might pain her.

"You remember my husband," she said, interpreting his embarrassment. "It is of him I want to talk to you. I think you are good and true, Mr. Florestan, and I am going to trust you with the secrets of the dead. I am going to show you some old letters —letters written to my dear dead husband—which I would not show to anybody in this world if I did not hope that some good, some satisfaction to me and to my daughter, might come out of the light these letters can give."

"My dear Mrs. Arden, you do not surely hope that after all these years the murderer will be found through any clue that the past can afford?"

"I don't know what I hope—but I want to find a woman who loved my husband very tenderly and truly before ever I saw his face. She was a friendless girl in this city, a girl who had to work for her living, but her letters are the outcome of a refined nature, and I feel a melancholy interest in her. My heart yearns towards the woman who loved my husband, and who might have been his wife, but for difference of caste."

"Did your husband tell you about this youthful love affair?"

"He alluded to it laughingly once or twice during our married life; but I knew nothing more than that he had once been in love with a French grisette, until the week before my second marriage. I had a curious fancy before that great change in my life to go back upon the past." There was a regretfulness in her tone at this point which was a revelation to Florestan. "So I occupied myself

for a whole night, when every one else in the house had gone to bed, in looking over my husband's papers. I had been through them more than once before, and had classified and arranged them as well as I could; but I suppose I was not very business-like in my way of doing this, for among some commonplace letters from old college friends I found a little packet of letters in a woman's hand, which I had overlooked before."

She opened her desk as she spoke, and took out a small packet of letters tied with red tape. There had been no sentimental indulgence in the way of satin ribbon for the milliner's poor little letters. The tape was faded and old, and it was the same piece which Robert Hatrell's own hand had tied round them.

"Please read one or two of those letters, and tell me if they speak to your heart as they spoke to mine," she said, as she put the packet into Florestan's hand.

He untied the tape, counted the letters, seven in all, and then began to read the letter of the earliest date.

"Rue Chauve-Souris, Faubourg St. Antoine,
"9th May.

"It was like a day spent in heaven while we were together yesterday. I felt as if it was years and years since I had seen green fields and blue water. Oh! the beautiful river, and the island where we dined. I did not think there was anything so lovely within an hour's journey from Paris. Ah, how good it was of you to give a poor hard-working girl so much pleasure! I have been in Paris more than a year, and no one ever showed me a glimpse of the country until yesterday. My brother was too busy with his inventions, and there was no one else. I wonder at your goodness, that you should take so much trouble for a poor girl; and that you should not be ashamed to be seen with any one so shabby and insignificant."

Three other letters followed, telling the same story of a Sunday in the environs of Paris, of the woods and the river, and the rapture of being with *him*. Gradually the pen had grown bolder, and it was of love the girl wrote to her lover—a humble, confiding, romantic, girlish love, which took no thought for the morrow, asked no questions, suffered no agonies of doubt. She wrote as if her happiness were to know no change—as if those Sunday excursions to pleasant places were to go on for ever. She told him how she had gone to mass before she met him at the railway station, or the

steamboat pier, and how she had prayed for him at the altar of the Blessed Virgin.

The later letters had a more serious tone, and breathed the fear that her romance must come to an end.

"It has been like a dream to know you and be loved by you," she wrote; "but is the dream to end in darkness, and the long dull life that would be left for me if you were to go away and forget me? I suppose it must be so. I have been too happy to remember that such happiness could not last. You will go back to your own country, and fall in love with a young English lady, and forget that you ever spent happy days on the Seine, laughing and talking with your poor Toinette. You will forget the arbour on the island where we dined in the twilight, while music and singing went past us in the boats, while we sat hidden behind vine leaves, and heard everything without being seen. Oh, how sweet it was! I shall never see any more stars like those that shone upon us as we came from Marly one night, sitting side by side on a bench on the roof of the train. I shall never see the river in Paris without thinking that it is the same river on which our boat has drifted, oh! so lazily, while we have talked and forgotten everything except our own faces and our own voices. All that was beautiful in the river and the landscape seemed not outside us, but a part of ourselves and of our love."

There was more in the same strain, but later the key changed to saddest minor.

"I know you cannot marry me; indeed, I never thought or hoped to be your wife. I only wanted our love to go on as long as it could. I wanted it to go on for ever, asking no more than to see you now and then, once a week, once in a month, even—ah, even once a year! I could live all through a long dull year in the hope of seeing you for one blessed hour on New Year's Day. Is that too much to ask? You cannot guess how little would content me—anything except to lose you for ever. The day that you say to me, 'Good-bye, Toinette, we shall never meet again,' will be the day of my death. You are the better part of my life. I cannot live without you. I think of you in every hour of the day. I think of you with every stitch my needle makes through the long hours in which I sit at work. The sprig of willow you picked when we were in the boat last Sunday is like a living thing to me—as precious as if it had a soul, and could sympathize with me in my love and my sorrow."

Florestan read on till the last word in the last letter.

"Do those sad little letters touch you as they touched me?" asked Clara.

"Yes, they are pretty little letters. They are full of a tender, sentimental love which might mean much or little. There is no knowing how much reality there is in all this sentiment. Women are actresses from their cradle. They can simulate everything—love, or hate, or pride, or jealousy; nothing comes amiss to them. But there is a pretty little air of self-abnegation in these letters which takes my fancy, just as it took yours."

"I believe that the sentiment in them is real," said Clara, "and I want to know what became of this poor girl after the last letter was written. I want to know whether she is living or dead. Remember, it was her name that was used to lure my husband to his death. There must have been some link between the murderer and that girl."

"Ah, I remember. There was a woman's name mentioned."

"Yes, Colonel MacDonald heard the name. It was Antoinette. He had heard my husband speak of a grisette with whom he had once been in love."

"Do you think the girl was concerned in the murder?"

"The girl who wrote those letters? No, assuredly not."

"There are women whose slighted love turns to remorseless hate," said Florestan.

"Not such a woman as the writer of those letters. She is so humble, so unselfish. She accepts her fate in advance. No, I am sure she was a good woman. I want to find her if I can, to help her if she is poor and friendless. I want to find her for her own sake; but still more for mine. She may be able to give the clue to the murderer. Her name was used as a lure, and very few people can have known that Robert ever cared for that girl. The man who made that vile use of her name must have known of that old love affair. He may have been the brother of whom she writes."

"My dear Mrs. Arden, would it not be wiser—in your circumstances, with new ties—a husband who worships you, a daughter who adores you—would it not be wiser to draw a curtain over that one dreadful scene in your life—that one terrible loss which you suffered nearly eight years ago?"

"I cannot! I cannot forget the man I loved with all my heart and strength," exclaimed Clara, passionately. "Do you think because I have married again that he is forgotten? Do you think

that I have forgotten his life which was so bright and happy, so full of gladness for himself and others; or his miserable death? No, I have not forgotten! I have married a good man, whom I honour and esteem. I am as happy as the most devoted love can make me: but I do not forget. Ever since I found those letters I have been brooding over the possibility of the murderer being discovered by that woman's agency."

"Do you think that if her brother was the murderer she would betray him?"

"I think she would no more have forgiven his murderer than I have—even if he is her brother."

"But she would hardly put a rope round his neck."

"Perhaps not. Only find her for me, if you can, Mr. Florestan, and I shall be deeply grateful. You who know Paris so well, and who are living here, may have opportunities."

"If she is to be found I will find her. But these letters were written more than twenty years ago, and the cleverest police-agent in Paris might fail in tracing her after such an interval. Remember, we do not even know her surname. The letters have only one signature—Toinette."

"There is the address of the house in which she lived."

"That is the only clue. We must begin upon that."

"You are very good. You can understand, perhaps, why I appeal to you instead of to my husband. In the first place, he is a dreamer and thinker rather than a man of action. He knows very little of Parisian life, and he would not know how to set to work. And in the second place, it might trouble him to know that my mind had been dwelling upon the past."

"I understand perfectly. I conclude that you have told him nothing about these letters?"

"Not a word."

"There is one circumstance connected with your husband's death which has always mystified me," said Florestan, after a thoughtful pause. "How came the murderer, a foreigner and altogether unconnected with your husband's life at Lamford, to be so well informed about his plans—to know that on such a day and at such an hour he would be on his way to Lincoln's Inn with a large sum of money upon his person? The man's plans had evidently been made some days in advance—the lodging was taken with one deadly intent. The woman who acted as an accomplice must have been taught her part in advance; the flight to the Riviera with the money

must have been deliberately thought out, for there was not an hour lost in the disposal of the notes. A little hesitation, a few hours' delay, and the police would have been able to track the plunder. Everything was arranged and carried out with a diabolical precision which argues foreknowledge."

"I have puzzled over the same question till my brain has reeled," answered Clara. "Some one must have given the information—one of our servants—a lawyer's clerk, perhaps. I dismissed every servant we had at that time, with the one exception of my daughter's nurse, as soon as I recovered from my illness. I would not have anybody about me who might even unconsciously have helped to bring about my husband's death. All our servants knew what was going to happen. We talked of the purchase very often, and at dinner on the evening before Robert went to London we discussed his visit to the bank and to the lawyers, and his appointment to lunch with Colonel MacDonald at the Club."

"It is just possible that the murderer was in your house that evening," said Florestan, "and that he obtained detailed information from one of your maid-servants. Women are such fools, and women of that class will believe anything that a smooth tongue tells them. It was the year after the war, a time when London swarmed with exiled communists. It is possible that this girl's brother was among them; that he harboured an old grudge against her lover; that he took pains to find out all he could about your husband's circumstances, and, hearing of the purchase money which was to be carried from the bank to the lawyer's office, conceived the daring idea of a murder and robbery in broad daylight, in a house full of people. I take it that the police would make some investigations in your household, although the murder occurred in London?"

"I know very little of what happened at that time. I was too ill to be told anything that was being done—and after I recovered I had too great a horror of the past. I dared not speak about my husband's death. Years have brought calmness. I can think of it now—and reason about it—though I shall never understand why God cut short that happy life in so cruel a manner—I shall never understand the wisdom of my heavy chastisement."

Florestan was silent, pitying her with all his heart, both for the husband she had lost, and for the husband to whom she had given herself in a loveless union. He had seen enough of Ambrose Arden and his wife to divine that there was profound affection on the husband's side, and on the wife's only the sad submission of a

woman who has given away her life in self-abnegation, pitying a passion which she cannot reciprocate.

Daisy and her betrothed came into the room at this moment, she laden with bunches of white lilac and Maréchale Niel roses, as tribute to her mother. It seemed to Florestan as if Spring itself had come dancing into the room, incarnate in that graceful figure in a cream-coloured frock and sailor hat, shining upon him out of those sunny hazel eyes, giving warmth and brightness to the atmosphere.

She shook hands with Florestan in the friendliest way—too friendly to be flattering to a man who was accustomed to exercise a somewhat disturbing influence upon the other sex. But a girl who is engaged to be married has sometimes no eyes for any man except her lover. Florestan had experienced that kind of thing: and he had experienced the other kind of thing from girls who are ever on the alert for fresh conquests, and who are only stimulated to audacity by the knowledge that they have secured one man for their bond-slave.

Daisy had no hidden thoughts. She was just as simple and unaffected, just as unconscious of her own charms as she had been four years ago when she was still a child, with all a child's thoughts and pleasures. How different she was from the type of woman he had once compared with Dante's Beatrice, with Petrarch's Laura: the splendid and grandiose among women, the Queen of Beauty in the World's Tournament! That magnificent type had for ever ceased to fascinate Gilbert Florestan.

He stayed to luncheon, half reluctantly, yet unable to resist his inclination to linger. Ambrose Arden came in from his book-sale flushed with triumph. He had gratified desires of long-standing by the purchase of certain early editions of French classics—Villon, Ronsard, Clement Marot. His son made light of the father's craze for books with a certain imprint.

"What does it matter who printed a book, or where, or when?" he cried. "The book is only a voice—the voice of the dead. It is a spiritual thing. It is the soul belonging to a body that has long been dust. How can it matter what outward form the soul wears—upon what kind of rags the divine speech has been printed—what kind of leather keeps the book from falling to pieces? I am amazed when I see people going into ecstasies about binding—except as furniture to brighten a room. For a book I really care about, the outward form is of not the smallest account to me."

"You are young, Cyril," his father answered gently. "Youth

has the kernel of the nut; age must be content with the husk. Old men have to invent pleasures and passions. There is so much that they have left behind them for ever."

"That is a very reasonable explanation of the collector's mania, my dear father," answered Cyril, "but it is a great deal too early in the day for you to begin to meditate upon the consolations of old age. The sun of your life is still in the meridian. Daisy and I are like the young birds, just peeping out of our nests at the rosy glow of dawn."

The River Lawn party left Paris two days after Clara's interview with Gilbert Florestan, he seeing them off at the station, an attention which, to Cyril Arden, seemed somewhat superfluous. Superfluous also the basket of Maréchale Niel roses which Florestan handed into the railway carriage after the ladies had taken their seats.

"You will have your own roses to-morrow," he said to Mrs. Arden, "and if they are not quite so fine as these importations from the south, I dare say you will like them better because they are home grown. I shall think of you all at River Lawn, and of my empty house close by."

"Why don't you come and fill it?" asked Clara.

"I mean to do so before long. I shall give up vagrant diplomacy and settle down as a small Berkshire squire. I begin to feel that I am not of the stuff which makes ambassadors, and that a roving life is all very well till a man approaches his thirtieth birthday, but begins to pall afterwards. My Paris is as familiar as an old song—I know all her tricks and her manners."

He shook hands with mother and daughter, said good-bye, yet lingered and said good-bye again until stern officials ordered him off. He loitered at the carriage door till the very last moment.

He sighed as he walked away from the terminus, and he was full of thought through all the dreary length of the Rue de Lafayette.

"Happy fellow, to be beginning life with such a girl as that for his companion," he mused, thinking of Cyril. "She is so gentle, yet so bold, so fresh and frank and gay and clever—a child in ignorance of all base things; a woman in power to understand all that is great and noble. If ever I care again for womankind my love will be just such a girl as that. I wonder if there are many such, and where they are to be found."

He wondered too, though he scarcely shaped the thought, whether

if the world were rich in girls as innocent and as bright, endowed with all the qualities that made Margaret Hatrell charming, he should be attracted to any other specimen of the kind as he had been attracted to her. He wondered whether it might not be the individual rather than the type which had fascinated him.

He pondered these questions as if in a purely speculative mood, but was careful not to answer them. They were doubts which floated through his mind like cloudlets in a summer sky. And in his mind there floated also the image of a girl's face, fresh and fair, with no taint or tarnish of the world, no artificial embellishment of paint or powder, pencil or brush, upon its pure young beauty. The image haunted him long after the train had carried Clara Arden and her daughter to Calais, long after they had settled down quietly at River Lawn.

He did not forget the commission which Mrs. Arden had entrusted to him. He went to the Rue Chauve-Souris on the morning after that leave-taking at the station, and found the house which, if there had been no alteration in the numbering of the street within the last twenty-two years, must once have sheltered the girl who loved Robert Hatrell.

It was a narrow house, with a shoemaker's shop on the ground floor, kept by one of those small traders who do more in the way of repairing old boots and shoes than of selling new ones. There was a side door, which was open, and a narrow passage, leading to a staircase, where there was just enough light to reveal the dirt and shabbiness of the walls, and the indications of poverty upon every landing.

Florestan went to the top of the house without meeting anybody; but he heard the voice of children upon the first floor, a domestic quarrel upon the second, with voices raised to their highest pitch in accents of recrimination, while on the top story a woman was singing a monotonous sentimental melody, in apparent unconsciousness of the strife below. It was evident there were separate households upon each story.

The sing-song voice of the woman in the garret was so suggestive of a peaceful menage that Florestan took courage to knock at her door, which was opened by the singer, a faded woman with a gentle, long-suffering countenance, a washed-out cotton gown, and a little cashmere shawl pinned across attenuated shoulders. A baby in a cradle in the corner near the hearth accounted for the monotonous chaunt which Florestan had heard outside.

He apologized for his intrusion, and explained that he was in search of a woman who had lived in that house twenty-two years before. Would Madame direct him to the oldest inhabitant of the house?

"You won't have far to go to find her," answered the woman. "There's only one lodger who has been in this house over two or three years, and I fancy that she must have lived here since the taking of the Bastille. Nobody knows how old she is, but it wouldn't surprise me to be told she was a hundred. If she has sense enough or memory enough to answer your questions she ought to be able to tell you anything you want to know about former lodgers."

"Who is this person?"

"Mademoiselle Lafont, a poor pensioner of a noble family in Touraine. She is a distant relation of the Marquis de Lafont, who allows her a tiny pension. Her grandfather and grandmother were guillotined in '92, and her father was left a helpless lad in Paris. She will tell you her story. She loves to talk of her youth and its dangers. And though she has a very poor memory for events that happened yesterday, she remembers the smallest things connected with her childhood."

"If that is the condition of her mind, she may have forgotten a lodger of twenty-two years ago," suggested Florestan.

"I can't answer for that. I can only tell you that she must have been in this house with your lodger. If you want to talk to her I can take you down to her room. She is very poor, but her room is always clean and neat. She has just strength enough left to attend to that, and when her sweeping and dusting are done she sits all day by the window rolling her thumbs and talking to her canary bird."

"Poor old soul! I feel interested in her from your description, and shall be much obliged if you will introduce me to her."

CHAPTER XIII.

UNDER-CURRENTS.

THE woman looked at her sleeping baby to assure herself that he was not likely to awake for the next few minutes, and then accompanied Florestan to the landing below, where she knocked at the door of a room towards the front of the house. A feeble old voice called to her to enter, and she entered, leaving Florestan outside.

There was a brief parley, after which he was admitted to a narrow slip of a room with a deep-set window, and a small fireplace in the corner. The furniture consisted of an old walnut-wood wardrobe, with heavy brass handles, much too large for the room, a narrow bedstead, a comfortable armchair, and a small round table. There was a closet on one side of the room, which served the old lady for her toilet.

The wall space, where not obscured by the tall wardrobe, was covered with old-fashioned prints and coloured lithographs, in which might have been read "an abstract and brief chronicle of the time" since the fall of the Bastille, which was depicted in one of the most noticeable of the engravings. They were for the most part scenes of revolution or bloodshed, the Death of the Duc d'Enghien, the Days of June, the *Coup d'Etat*, the Execution of Maximilian, the Commune. There were coarsely executed prints of half a century ago, in marked contrast with the superior art of later years.

The old woman sat in her armchair by the window, neatly clad in a black alpaca gown and a picturesque white cap, her missal and rosary on the table by her side, and her canary chirrupping in his cage in the window.

The withered old face had all the traces of good looks and of good blood, and there was no lack of intelligence in the keen gray eyes which scrutinized the stranger.

"Take the trouble to seat yourself, Monsieur," said Mademoiselle Lafont, pointing graciously to the only unoccupied chair, which was placed opposite her own. "My good friend yonder"—with a glance at the door through which Florestan's introducer had retired—"tells me you want information about some former lodger. I was born in this house, and I have lived in it nearly ninety years."

"That is a curious thing to happen in such a restless city as Paris," said Florestan, interested in the sad old face, the dull

and barren life. "How came it, Mademoiselle, that your life was thus uneventful?"

"There are many such lives in every great city, Monsieur—lives that are of little more account than the life of a limpet on a rock. My father was flung like a weed on the ocean of Paris, a lad of sixteen, without friends or home. His father was an advocate, prosperous, successful; his mother was a beauty, sought after by the best people in Paris. All his boyhood had been spent in the stormy atmosphere of the Revolution, but the troubles of those dreadful years seemed hardly to have touched his home. His father was in constant employment, and had a voice in the National Assembly, where his eloquence made him a man of mark; his mother's friends still flocked round her, except when now and then the guillotine made a sudden gap in the circle. The Dominicans in whose house my father had been educated were broken up and dispersed. He was at home in idleness, enjoying his life and all the fever of the time—waiting till his father should have leisure to take up the thread of his education, hoping to follow in his father's footsteps as a successful advocate, full of belief in the golden harvest of that bloody seed which was being sown broadcast through the fairest cities of France. Boy as he was he was already an ardent politician, and had the entrée of more than one club where opinion was ultra red. One night he went home from a turbulent debate at one of his clubs to find the servants in tribulation and his home desolate. His father and mother had been arrested and taken to the Conciergerie. Within a week they had both passed by the gate which Fouquier Tinville kept on the road to Eternity. Their more fortunate friends were powerless to help them, or afraid to interfere. My grandfather had neglected his private interests for the cause of the Republic, and he died deeply in debt. Creditors took possession of house and property, and my father wandered about the streets, homeless and hungry, too proud to appeal to his father's friends."

The old woman paused for a few moments, and then, seeing that her listener was warmly interested, continued in her slow deliberate accents, quietly reciting a story which she had told to all comers for more than half a century.

"Chance brought him in his desolation to the threshold of this house. He sat down upon the step in front of the shop door; not because he chose that place above any other, but because he had reached the limit of his strength, and must needs drop somewhere. The shop is kept by a shoemaker now, and it was kept by a shoe-

maker then, a Provençal, whose father was head-gardener to Madame du Barry, at Luciennes, and who had come to Paris to seek his fortune in the golden days of Court favour. Madame du Barry's head was laid low, and Court favour was all at an end. François Vial and his wife were struggling on as best they might, mending and making shoes for Red Republicans."

"They were not too poor to have pity on your father, I take it?" said Florestan.

"Their hearts were larger than their means, Monsieur. They saw a fainting lad sitting on their doorstep, with his head leaning against the doorpost, and they took him in, and fed him, and comforted him. He told them that he was the son of suspects who had been guillotined, but that did not frighten them. They took him into their home and nursed him through a long illness, a low fever, the result of grief and privation. He had been wandering about the streets nearly a week before they took compassion upon him—wandering about and sleeping in dark corners of the city, with only a few sous between him and absolute starvation. François Vial and his wife were childless, and they took a fancy to the orphan, and taught him their trade. He had no other friend in the world to help him, for those of his father's friends who had not been swept away upon the strong tide of blood had left the country, and there was no one to help him except these good people. So he who was to have been an advocate and a senator was content to make and mend shoes, and he fell in love with an orphan niece of François Vial—a little fair-haired girl who had comforted him in his sorrow for his dead parents—and he married her when he was three and twenty, and when the new-fledged Empire was beginning in splendour and glory. He had quite reconciled himself to his humble avocation. He was content to remain what Destiny had made him. His mind seemed to have adapted itself easily to that humble sphere. I have often wondered that it was so, that the blood in his veins did not revolt against that daily drudgery, that narrow sordid life."

"It was strange, assuredly, that he never tried to get back into the sphere from which he had dropped."

"I think that in his long illness, when his mind was wandering most of the time, all the links that connected him with his past life may have weakened, till the influence of that life was nearly lost, and he was able to begin a new existence among low-born people without feeling much pain in the change. At any rate he never made any struggle to regain his lost place in the world—and later,

when François Vial and his wife had saved enough money to buy a little vineyard and olive orchard in Provence, he was glad to take to the business and the house in which he had worked, and it was in this house that I, his only surviving offspring, was born."

"How came it that you never married, Mademoiselle?" asked Florestan, after he had expressed all due interest in her narrative.

"Those who asked me to marry were people with whom I could not have been happy. It may be that something of the pride of race which had died out of my father's mind was revived in me. I always felt it a hard thing that my father, Eugène Lafont—de Lafont, as I saw the name written in old documents—should be a shoemaker. This street was not so shabby in my youth as it has been for the last forty years; but it was not a vulgar neighbourhood even then; and I used to walk in the fashionable quarters of Paris of a Sunday afternoon with my father, and used to feel that Fate had used us hardly. I saw the Marquis de Lafont drive by in his carriage, and my father told me that I came of his proud race. He made a joke of the difference between us; but it cut me to the quick that we who were of the same family should be so wide apart. My father and mother both died before I was thirty, and I was left alone in the world. They had just been able to make a living, but they had saved only as much as served to pay their debts and to bury them. The house and the business passed into other hands, but I stayed here like a piece of old furniture. I have been a lodger in this room in which you find me, ever since my father's death. I was able to earn my own living when I was eighteen by fine needlework, and I worked at the same business for fifty years. I was seventy years of age before I ever needed help from any one; but at that age my sight began to fail, and it would have gone hard with me if the Marquise de Lafont had not chanced to hear about me from the mistress of the large *lingerie* shop for which I had worked all those years. The Marquise took pity upon my helplessness, and pleaded my cause with the Marquis, who came to see me, and looked through my papers, and made out my father's relationship to the great family. Convinced of this, he granted me a small pension, which his house-steward has paid me ever since. His generosity has made my declining days peaceful and free from care. I rise from my bed every morning with the assurance that my daily bread is provided for me; and I know that I shall not lie in a pauper's grave, for my noble kinsman has promised me a niche in the family vault at Père Lachaise. I pray for the Marquis and his

family every day; and I hope that the prayers of a grateful old woman may be heard by the Blessed Virgin, whose Divine pity has succoured my loneliness."

"But you have not been altogether lonely, I hope, Mademoiselle. You have found sympathy and friendship, even within these walls," said Florestan, gently leading up to the question which he wanted to ask.

"Yes, I have had friends here—friends who came and went. It has often seemed to me that this house is like a caravansary in an Arabian desert. My friends were so quickly gone, like travellers who stay only for a single night. Some have been very good to me. I would have loved them, if I had dared. You want to ask me about a lodger in this house, Madame Manant told me. Was the person here in the long past?"

"Two and twenty years ago."

"Ah, that is not the past. The friends I remember best are those of fifty years ago. Who was the person you are curious about?"

"A milliner's apprentice, called Toinette. I do not know her surname."

"A milliner's apprentice," repeated the old woman musingly. "There have been many such in the attics. Bright girl-faces, sad girl-faces, have passed by my door through the long years, and have faded and vanished like my own dreams. Toinette, Toinette, Toinette," she repeated, still musing.

Florestan waited patiently while the slow memory of old age wandered in the dim corridors of the past. Presently the old woman took up her missal and began to look through the well-thumbed pages. Between the leaves there were many of those little pictures of Madonna, saints, and martyrs, which Romanists love, and every one of those little engravings, with their lace borders, was a souvenir of some vanished friend, and on every one of them there was some scrap of writing.

She looked through them slowly and carefully, and at last came to a little picture of St. Stephen, on the back of which was written:

"To Mdlle. Lafont, from her loving Toinette.—St. Stephen's Day, 1857."

"There is the name, at least," said the spinster. "Toinette! Yes; I remember. She was a sweet girl, and I was very fond of her, and I think I helped her to escape a great danger. But she vanished like the rest of my friends. They were all shadows.

There is only this lonely room and that birdcage, with its changing occupant, that remain. I try to cheat myself with the fancy that the bird is always the same; but even he changes. I put away my poor little dead canary, and buy myself a new one, and call him by the old name; but it is long before he gets to know me as the dead bird did. Ah, Monsieur, that is what makes life hard, that it should be so short for some and so long for others."

"Yes, Mademoiselle, that is a misery we all feel. But it is some consolation to have lived a blameless life, as you have."

"Limpets live blameless lives," retorted Mademoiselle Lafont, with a touch of scorn. "There is no more merit in my blameless life than in a limpet's. But you were asking about Toinette."

"Yes. Please tell me all you can. Her surname in the first place."

"Impossible. I have quite forgotten it."

"What was the danger from which you helped to save her?"

"Her romantic love of a man who was her superior in station—an Englishman."

"You do not think that any evil came out of that love?"

"It almost broke the girl's heart: no more evil than that. I believe the man meant honourably, though he trifled with a girl who adored him. He did not mean to betray her. He was touched by her love for him. He gave her some half-dozen jaunts to the villages near Paris; *tête-à-tête* Sunday afternoons upon the Seine, which are not always so harmless as in this case. He respected her innocence and her friendlessness; and she was able to respect herself. I was her only confidante, and I warned her of the peril which she ran when she gave her heart to a man who was very unlikely to marry her. She had not long come from the South, and she had only one relation in Paris, a brother, who did not often come near her."

"Do you know how the brother earned his living?"

"He was an assistant in a chemist's shop."

"Did you ever see him?"

"Two or three times. Toinette brought him into this room, to show him off, and to let him talk to me. She was proud of him, because he was cleverer than most young men of his station; but I don't think he was as kind to her as he might have been, seeing that she was a stranger and alone in this great city."

"Did he know of her love affair?"

"Not at the beginning; but afterwards at my advice she told

him all about her Sunday jaunts with the Englishman. He made a great fuss, and swore that the Englishman should marry her; and although my poor Toinette entreated him not to interfere he evidently did so, for a few days after their conversation the girl received a letter from her admirer, bidding her farewell, and enclosing an English bank-note for two thousand five hundred francs. She brought the letter to me in her despair. She was broken-hearted, poor child. She told me she had never hoped to marry him. She only wanted to be with him for a little while now and then, as she had been at Bougival or Asnières—just to see him and to hear his voice; just to know that he cared for her, though she could never be more to him than his humble friend. And now he bade her farewell for ever! His letter was a kind letter, a gentleman's letter, written in very good French. I tried to make her understand that there was no other course for the Englishman to take, if he were an honest man. If she could not be his wife she could be nothing to him. I told her that it was kind of him to send her a parting gift, which would be a *dot* for her when she should marry some honest young man in her own station."

"Was she willing to accept his gift?" asked Florestan.

"Not she! The poor romantic child burst into a fresh flood of tears, and asked me if I could think her so base as to take a price for her broken heart. 'He has been very cruel to me,' she said, 'and the cruellest act of all was to send me this money. I shall send it back to him.' I begged her to think better of it, and to remember that if her health failed her, or work should be hard to get by-and-by, that there would be nothing between her and starvation. 'If there were not,' she said, 'I would not eat the price of my love. I did not sell him my heart; I gave it to him freely, and would again, and again, and again. I love him as I love God and His Saints.'"

"Did she return the note?"

"It passed out of her hands, but whether it reached the giver is more than I can say. She had written her letter and enclosed the money in the envelope when her brother happened to meet her. His visits had been more frequent than usual since he found out her love-story. He questioned her about the letter, and she told him what she had done. He approved, and offered to deliver the letter, telling her that there would be a risk in sending so much money through the post. It had been delivered to her by hand, I may observe. My poor Toinette was simple enough to trust him:

but whether the money ever reached its destination is doubtful. I never liked her brother's countenance or manner, and I certainly would not have trusted him with any delicate commission."

"Did you see much of him after that time, Mademoiselle?"

"No; he was too much taken up by politics or clubs to waste his time upon an old woman like me, or to pay much attention to his sister. I saw more of her than ever, poor child, for she had no one now to take her into the country on a Sunday afternoon, and her Sundays were mostly spent in this room. She was very good to me. She used to read to me, and cheer me with her company, though it was too plain that all the happiness had gone out of her own life. She lived in this house till the dark days of the Commune, and in all that time she had no new sweetheart, no friend except an old woman. She was a splendid worker—industrious, economical, as good as gold. And so the years crept on, she leading her dull, uncomplaining life, and I saw the second Empire crumble and fall into ruin as I had seen the first and greater Empire. After the troubles began Toinette's brother took her away to London with him at an hour's warning. He had been entangled with the Communists, and he was in no small risk of being sent to New Caledonia. From that time to this I have heard nothing of her or of him. I think if she had prospered and been happy she would have written to me, so I fear that all has not gone well with her."

"If you could only remember that young man's name," said Florestan.

"His name—yes, I remember. His name was Claude—Claude Morel."

Memory, which had failed Mademoiselle Lafont, when she tried to recall the sister's surname, recalled the name of the brother without an effort.

"I thank you most cordially, Mademoiselle, for the amiability with which you have answered all my questions," began Florestan; when the old woman interrupted him—

"Do not suppose it has been irksome to me to talk to you," she said, with her sly smile; "my life is very lonely, and I have few intelligent people to talk to, and I dare say you know that women like to talk, especially old women. You have let me talk about myself, and my poor little history. It is always a pleasure to tell one's own history."

"If you have pleased yourself, dear Mademoiselle, you have done me a service all the same, and I should like to present you with

some little souvenir of our conversation. I cannot venture to offer you money."

"Pray do not," said the little old lady, drawing up her head with a certain hauteur which did not ill become her; "I am very poor, and I live upon charity, but it is a kinsman's charity. I have enough for my small wants, and I like to think myself a lady, though my father was a shoemaker."

"Believe me, I know how to honour good birth and refined manners wherever I meet with them," replied Florestan, deferentially. "I want, therefore, to offer you some little gift—something for this room in which you spend your days, for instance—which you may receive without the slightest derogation of dignity."

"Ah, Monsieur, do not laugh at an old woman—more than old enough to be your grandmother. It seems a satire to talk of my dignity—in this one poor room—which serves me for bedroom, parlour, and kitchen."

"Ah, but dignity does not depend on surroundings, except so far as they belong to character. The exquisite neatness of this room would alone tell me that I am in the apartment of a lady."

He looked round the poor little room, so scantily furnished, so old and faded as to woodwork and wall-paper, yet with that look of airiness and perfect purity which some women know how to give to the poorest room. One thing only seemed to him out of harmony, and seeing that Mademoiselle Lafont liked to talk to him, and was quite ready to give him her confidence, he ventured to express his wonder at the style of art which she had chosen to adorn her walls.

"You wonder that I should surround myself with scenes of bloodshed," she said, "with the image of the guillotine which made my poor father an orphan in the morning of his life—with the picture of the fall of that fortress, with whose ancient towers there fell the old aristocracy of France, never to rise again with the old power, or the old influence over the fate of men. It is a strange taste, perhaps, but I like to look at the dreadful records of that revolution which robbed me of fortune and station before I was born, and which has given me so little except loud talk and empty promises in place of all it took away. I like to brood over the dark days that overshadowed Paris before this century and I were born. It is a morbid fancy, perhaps, but it pleases me. The history of my country is written in blood, and I like to read that history."

"Do the pictures never spoil your sleep, or mix themselves with your dreams?" asked Florestan.

"Very seldom. I have this under my pillow, and I have Her blessed image to reassure me." She touched her rosary with her long lean fingers, and glanced to the wall beside her bed, where a plaster statuette of the Virgin Mother stood on a little Swiss bracket above a *bénitier*.

"What shall I bring you to decorate your room, Mademoiselle?" inquired Florestan, smiling at the little old lady, so serene in her simple faith.

"Ah, Monsieur, you tempt me to impose on your generosity."

And then, almost reluctantly, the ancient spinster confessed that there was one thing for which she had been longing for the last thirty years, ever since she had begun to feel age creeping on with increasing sensitiveness to cold. She had longed for a *duvet*, a little eider-down quilt, to put upon her bed. Every Frenchwoman of any substance has her *duvet*; but how was she, whose little pension just served for food and fire, to save money enough to buy herself a *duvet?* It was not possible. She had been trying for thirty years; but when by much hard pinching and scraping there were a few francs in the *tirelire*, there came sickness, and the *tirelire* had to be broken to pay for medicine and wine and soup.

"You shall have the *duvet* this evening. You shall sleep under it to-night," cried Florestan, enchanted at being able to gratify a long-cherished wish of this patient creature's.

He thought of the lonely monotony of her life, with inexpressible sadness. Could life in that gloomy old fortress which once stood not far off from this gloomy street have been very much more dismal than life in this one small room over the cobbler's shop? Such a street! not one pleasing object, not one spot of brightness or colour to be seen from the window, strain one's eyes and rick one's neck as one might. Nothing but the dull gray houses over the way, and the dull gray street right and left of the window.

Florestan not only promised the eider-down, but he promised also to go and see Mademoiselle Lafont again, and then, after gently touching the wasted hand, he took up his hat and bowed himself out of the room.

His first visit was to the Bon Marché, where he chose an eider-down quilt of the very best quality, covered with rose-coloured silk. It was a relief to him to think that there would be one little bit of vivid colour in that long neutral-tinted street, though nobody would see it except the little old lady.

"When the warm weather begins I will send her some pots of

stocks and wall-flowers from the Flower Market, and beg her to put them on her window-sill, as an act of Christian charity," he said to himself. "It is too dreadful to think of people living in such a street—while within half-an-hour's walk there are the laughing gardens and the white villas, the gilded gates and glass porches, the bright-coloured folly and frivolity of the Avenue de l'Impératrice, or whatever these republicans call the place. I only remember the old names that I knew when I was a boy."

The eider-down despatched to the old lady, Florestan's next visit was to a man he had sometimes had occasion to employ while he was secretary of Legation, a man who may be loosely described as a private detective. To this person he imparted his desire to find out the whereabouts and occupation, surroundings and character of a certain Claude Morel, employed before the Commune as a chemist's assistant—subsequent mode and manner of life unknown.

"I have reason to believe that he was concerned in some of the outrages of that period," said Florestan, finally, "and that when the troops from Versailles got into Paris, he found it prudent to get out, with as little delay as possible."

"If he was active and influential at that time, I ought to be able to find out all about him," said M. Jaluc, "for there has been a pretty sharp look-out kept upon those gentlemen—especially upon those who escaped a voyage over the seas. Give me a few days to make my inquiries, Mr. Florestan, and I will call on you with the result."

This was all that Gilbert Florestan could do towards the fulfilment of his promise to Mrs. Arden. He wrote a long letter to her after his interview with Mademoiselle Lafont, relating all that he had learnt about Antoinette Morel. It was a relief to his mind to be able so to write, for when entrusted with his commission he had feared that his investigation of Robert Hatrell's life in Paris might reveal an intrigue which it would not be well for the wife to know. Happily, in this memory of a past love, or perhaps only a passing fancy, all was innocent. A city idyll set in a young man's history, like a flower between the leaves of a book.

Florestan went again to the sombre old salon in the Rue St. Guillaume, where the three women lived in luxurious seclusion. He was the only visitor on this occasion, although it was the evening which Madame Quijada set apart for her friends. It was obvious that her circle was of the smallest.

The room was full of flowers, as before—costliest flowers.

Masses of azaleas and white lilac lighted up the dark panelled walls; a shallow vase, filled with gardenias, exhaled an almost oppressive perfume in the drowsy atmosphere; and Dolores wore a cluster of heavy yellow roses, fastened amidst the rich black lace of her bodice with a diamond pin. These things told of wealth from some source or other, and Florestan suspected that the source was not altogether holy.

Louise Marcet received him with a gentle smile. Her plain black gown and complete absence of ornament contrasted oddly with the subdued splendour of her aunt and cousin; but the melancholy expressed in her face was hardly more pronounced than Mademoiselle Quijada's ennui. And Florestan told himself that the young and lovely woman was not much happier than the faded spinster, whose age he was unable to guess. That iron-grey hair was evidently premature, and the deep lines in the face were those which sorrow ploughs in young faces, rather than the wrinkles of advancing years.

Florestan found his society appreciated by Dolores, who brightened at his coming, and seemed to enjoy his conversation. She talked very little herself, and she was evidently afraid of her mother, but she was not without intelligence. There was something in her look and manner which suggested the idea of an imprisoned spirit, a nature bound and trammelled, a bird caught in a net.

Monsieur and Madame Duturque arrived soon after Florestan, and the Professor entertained the small assembly with various Rêveries, Suites, Nocturnes, and Gavottes of his own composition, which were so impressed with the stamp of the composer's individuality that to Florestan's untrained ear they sounded all alike. The utmost he could find to say about them was that they were strikingly original.

It was a very quiet evening. Louise Marcet sat in her favourite corner, and only replied when she was spoken to. At ten o'clock Madame Quijada invited her guests into an adjoining room, where tea and sorbets and daintiest sandwiches were served with some distinction. Florestan noted the massive silver, and delicate porcelain, and formed his own conclusions. Conversation grew livelier with the stimulus of this light refreshment. The excellent Duturque devoured foie-gras sandwiches by the dozen, and drank much straw-coloured tea out of shallow egg-shell cups, while his worthy wife nibbled sweet cakes, talking in a gentle strain all the

time to Madame Quijada about the delinquencies of her latest *bonne à tout faire.* This entertainment lasted nearly an hour, and the clock chimed eleven soon after the little party returned to the salon.

Florestan approached his hostess to take leave, when the door opened suddenly and a man walked unannounced into the room, saluted Madame Quijada with a careless nod as he passed her, and made straight for the piano, near which Dolores was seated talking to the Professor. He leant over Dolores and began to talk to her, without taking the faintest notice of any one else in the room.

"You are late, Leon," said Madame Quijada; "I had given you up for to-night."

"I've no doubt you were able to amuse yourself without me," replied the late arrival, with a resentful glance at Florestan. "May I ask to be introduced to your new friend?"

"Assuredly, if Monsieur permits." Florestan bowed. "M. Leon Duverdier—Mr. Florestan."

"Madame Quijada's circle is so small that a stranger's presence always makes an impression," said Duverdier. "Are you a resident in Paris, Mr. Florestan, or a visitor only? Your face seems familiar to me."

"Very likely, Monsieur, since I am a resident, and an habitué in many places where Parisians are mostly to be found."

Duverdier turned to Dolores, and Florestan was going to wish his hostess good night, when his attention was attracted by Louise Mareet, who had risen from her seat and was standing near the door of the dining-room, paler than he had ever seen her before, and with her eyes fixed upon Duverdier with an expression of mingled horror and aversion. Without a word, and with that gaze unchanging to the last, she passed into the dining-room, shutting the door behind her.

Duverdier noticed the manœuvre with a nervous little laugh.

"Mademoiselle Mareet is no more sociable than usual," he said lightly. "Has she been suffering from one of her hysterical attacks?"

Neither mother nor daughter answered his question, and he did not repeat it. Florestan changed his mind, and instead of bidding good night seated himself near Madame Quijada's sofa, where he remained while the Duturques took leave, a somewhat lengthy business, and while Dolores and the new-comer conversed in low voices, and with their heads very close together.

"This is the man she loves," thought Florestan; "but I don't think this is the man who finds the gilding for this luxurious cage."

He had made up his mind to outstay the late arrival, if he could without bad manners, and he occupied himself by a profound consideration of the stranger's appearance.

It was a handsome face and a clever face, but the cleverness was closely allied with craft, the good looks were marred by obvious indications of a premature decay, such decay as rarely comes from any other cause than a dissipated and wholly evil life. The lower part of the face was hidden by a thick black beard, but there were lines about the eyes which told a whole history to Gilbert Florestan. He had lived much amongst Frenchmen of all grades, and he knew what those wicked lines meant.

"I am sorry for Madame Quijada's daughter," he said to himself; and it was with a real sorrow that he saw the beautiful young head leaning so near the high, narrow forehead, prematurely bald and deeply lined—the fresh and pure cheek of girlhood almost touching the cheek of wasted manhood, with its livid, bloodless hue and sunken outline. "Women are like barnacles," he said; "they are always ready to fasten upon a wreck."

The timepiece chimed midnight. He could not decently protract his visit, having arrived at nine o'clock. Duverdier had a better excuse for lingering, and he evidently meant to stay.

Madame Quijada begged Florestan to repeat his visit. Dolores hardly looked up in answer to his parting salutation; her whole being seemed absorbed in Duverdier's half-whispered utterances.

"Where did you pick up your new friend?" asked Duverdier, directly the door closed upon the departing guest. "At that general miscellany of curiosities, the Duturque salon, I suppose," he went on, answering his own question. "Yet he looks a trifle too aristocratic to have come out of the Duturque collection."

"We met him at Madame Duturque's all the same," Madame Quijada replied coldly.

"Really! And may I ask your motive for making him free of this salon?"

"He is a gentleman, and he seemed interested in us. In our lonely lives it is pleasant to make an agreeable acquaintance whose society cannot compromise us."

"Do you think Perez would approve of such an acquaintance?"

"Perez is in Spain."

"Yes, but he is not going to stay there for ever; and when he

comes back to Paris, and finds your English acquaintance domesticated here, I doubt if he will be over pleased."

"He will not make any objection to an occasional visit from Mr. Florestan. Indeed, there is only one person to whom he seriously objects."

"Namely, your humble servant. I accept the prejudice as a compliment. And now, best of women, to business. I have been making a proposition to Dolores, but she is not an arithmetician, and I cannot inspire her with a proper appreciation of the difference between capital well invested and capital lying idle at a banker's."

"Don't trouble yourself to say another word," exclaimed Madame Quijada. "I know exactly what is coming. You have got into some new difficulty on the Bourse, and you want us to help you out of it—as we have done before, to our everlasting loss."

"I am not in a difficulty; but I have the chance of making a great *coup;* and you may share my luck, if you like."

"Thanks for the privilege. We are not gamblers."

"This is a certainty. The Valley of Dolce Aqua Mineral Works—a valley west of Santa-Rosa, in the Sonoma Country, a valley which is one silver-mine. Since the Creation that wealth has lain there, unknown, undreamt of. It is known now only to a chosen few. The whole valley has been bought for a song. Shares in the property are now to be had at par. Once the truth gets known they will go up five hundred per cent. You know what silver has done for Mackay. In the Dolce Aqua Valley there is the making of twenty Mackays. Will you go in for a share in a big pile while you've the chance?"

"No," answered Madame Quijada, with uncompromising firmness.

"That is a monosyllabic answer."

"At any rate it is one you can't misunderstand. I think it was copper last time, was it not? And the time before it was lead, and before that quicksilver. What will it be next time, I wonder? Perhaps brass."

"My dear aunt, you are unscientific; brass does not grow in mines."

"No? Only on the foreheads of men, I suppose."

There was a long silence, during which Duverdier paced the room with a troubled air.

He was decidedly handsome, and he had a certain style which is attractive among a certain class, though it is the very opposite of good style. He was in evening dress, but there was a carelessness

about his costume, and an odour of tobacco, which hinted that his evening had not been spent in very exacting society.

"Well," he said at last, looking first at Dolores and then at her mother, "if you will not go in with me, and pull off a fortune, perhaps you will help me by a loan. I have pledged myself to take a hundred shares at five hundred francs per share, and have paid a deposit of twenty per cent., which will be forfeited if I don't take them up, to say nothing of the discredit. Will you lend me twenty thousand francs for three months?"

"My dear Leon, you talk as if we were Rothschilds, my poor girl and I."

"I talk with a perfect knowledge of who and what you are," replied Duverdier, in a cold, hard voice, and with a cruel emphasis upon every word. "I talk with the knowledge that Dolores has but to lift up her finger in order to get any money she wants out of that old money-bag, Perez, whom you and she only tolerate because he *is* a money-bag. She has only to say to him, 'I have a capriee which will cost me twenty or thirty thousand francs'—a gown, a horse, an orchid, what you will—for the cheque to be written and the cash placed at her disposal, to fling out of window if she likes."

"What if he were to guess that the caprice was another name for a lover's necessity?" asked Madame Quijada.

"He will not guess. He is blind and helpless where Dolores is concerned."

"Well, he is not going to be fooled this time. I forbid my daughter to lend you another louis. You have bled us enough already—enough for a lifetime. You belong to an insatiable race—the race of gamblers. Race-course, Monte Carlo, or Bourse, it is all the same thing. Call the vice by what name you like, it means ruin!"

"And yet if it had not been for one venture of mine you would never have been able to make a new start in life at Madrid as a woman of good family," said Duverdier, white with anger. "You owe me everything, and yet refuse to help me in my need!"

"You had better forget that old debt, for fear I should remember it too often," said the elder woman.

There was something in her tone, something in her look, that silenced him for a time, and when he spoke next all the insolence was gone from his speech.

"For pity's sake help me with a few hundred louis!" he said. "If you refuse I am a lost man; and I know you have something

in an old stocking—more thousands than I am asking hundreds. You are too clever a woman not to provide for the hazards of the future."

"If I have put away something for my old age you can't suppose I shall destroy that provision in order to save you from a peril which would be renewed in less than six months. If things are desperate in Paris you had better get out of Paris while you can, and try your fortunes somewhere else. I never thought this a good place of residence for you."

"You have made up your mind?" he asked, with sudden fierceness.

"Irrevocably."

"So be it. Good night, Dolores."

He took her in his arms before she was aware, kissed her passionately, and walked to the door.

"What are you going to do?"

"You will know all about that to-morrow," he answered, and banged the door behind him to give emphasis to his words.

Dolores would have rushed out of the room in pursuit of him, but her mother stopped her on the threshold.

"He means to kill himself!" cried the girl wildly.

"Not he, child! Of a thousand men who make that kind of threat only one ever realizes it. *He* belongs to the nine hundred and ninety-nine."

CHAPTER XIV

DAISY'S DIARY AT LAMFORD.

HOME is sweet even after Italy, even after the bright and busy streets of Paris, with their flower-shops, and milliners, and bonbons, and prettinesses of all kinds, and the Bois, and the carriages, and the smart people, and the music, and the life and movement everywhere, and above all the opera and the theatres. Paris was very nice. I had no idea I could enjoy any city so much after Venice. I thought that enchanting labyrinth of marble, lying upon the breast of the waves, would take the colour out of every other city in the world. But Paris was nice, all the same, and I was sorry to leave it. Home is sweet always. I have been reading my German Plato this morning under the willows that shade my father's grave, in the old spot that has been my sanctuary ever since I began to read

serious books, and to try to understand the thoughts of great writers. Plato is so comforting after Schopenhauer and Hartmann. Plato is full of hope; they are the preachers of despair.

Mother seems happy to be at home again, in the old rooms, among the books and pictures, and in the gardens she loves so dearly. She has imported a small fortune in the shape of specimen conifers and azaleas and peonies and roses from a famous nurseryman near Paris; and she is happily employed in superintending the planting of her treasures. It is rather late for planting, our head-gardener says in his broad Scotch; and he even went so far as to give us a saying quoted by the great Sir Walter himself. "Plaunt a tree before Candlemass and ye may commaund it to grow: plaunt one after Candlemass and ye may joost entreat it to grow." But, in spite of Sir Walter's proverb, we must trust in Providence and in our good old Macpherson's skill.

Uncle Ambrose retains the cottage in which he has lived so long, and in which Cyril's childhood was spent. There is no room in our house for his books, which fill every available wall in the cottage, so he keeps them on their old shelves, and uses his old study when he is working on any subject which requires much reference to authorities. He is writing a new book, I believe, though he has not confessed as much to either mother or me. He is very reticent about his literary work, and seemed surprised and almost scared by the success of his last book, and by the tremendous amount of criticism and argumentation that was expended upon it.

"I could not live without literary work," he told me once; "but I do not derive much pleasure from the publication of a book. Critics are an aggravating race. They see meanings that I never meant; they overlook the better part of my work."

He is the most self-contained man this world ever saw, I believe. He takes no delight in the things that please other people; but he is the best and kindest friend I have, and he adores mother; so what can I want more in him to make up perfection? Cyril is his opposite in most things—all energy, action, light-heartedness. I sometimes wish he were a little less light-hearted. One may weary of perpetual sunshine. If I am ever in a sad or meditative mood I have a feeling that, however kind Cyril is, he can't understand me. He seems miles and miles away from me—as far as from England to America.

He has been away at Oxford since we came home, visiting some of his college friends. Of course I miss him sadly, but there is a

kind of relief in being alone, after continual companionship. Had Cyril been here I should not have been able to spend a morning by my father's grave. He would have wanted me to go for a ride, or a walk, or to row down to Henley. I fall back into my old ways and my sad, quiet life naturally, while he is away, and if it were not that we write to each other every day I might almost forget that we are engaged.

Uncle Ambrose is not fond of River Lawn. He does not say as much, but I know him too well not to find out his real feelings. Children have a way of watching faces; and I used to watch his face years ago to see when he was pleased or displeased with me, so that I came to know every line in his countenance, and what every line means.

No; he is not fond of River Lawn. All the things I love—the quaint old cottage rooms that father and mother found here before they were married, the low ceilings, the bow windows, the great oak beams, and diamond panes, and leaden lattices—have no charm for Uncle Ambrose. Nor yet the handsome rooms father built, so studiously arranged for mother's comfort; drawing-room and dining-room below, bedroom, dressing-room, and boudoir above. Nothing could be more picturesque than the old rooms, or more comfortable and luxurious than the new; and yet Uncle Ambrose does not like the house. I can see it in his face. He seems to bear a grudge towards the place father loved and cared about. Is it jealousy, I wonder? Surely a philosopher, a man who has studied the deeper meanings and mysteries of life, present and future, as Socrates studied them—surely such a man could not feel so petty and limited a feeling as jealousy—jealousy of my dear dead father's love and forethought for my mother; a jealousy so trivial as to set him against the rooms and the furniture my father provided for his wife.

No; I cannot believe him capable of such pettiness. He is a man of large mind and far-reaching thoughts, and to be jealous about chairs and tables—impossible!

But the fact still remains. Uncle Ambrose does not like River Lawn. He is full of his plans for the house in Grosvenor Square. He has been to London with my mother twice already, to hurry on the work. He wants to instal us there at the beginning of June, so that we may enjoy all the gaieties of the season, the summer season when people almost live out of doors. Mother is to be presented on her marriage, and I am to be presented by mother.

She has already begun to talk of my court gown, all white, like a bride's. Cyril suggested that it would be an economy for us to marry while the gown is fresh; but I told him that the idea of matrimony in relation to him had not yet entered my head.

"It has entered other people's heads, though, my dear Lady Disdain," said he. "I suppose you know that a certain suite of rooms in Grosvenor Square is being fitted with a view to our joint occupation?"

"'With a view' means any time within the next ten years," I told him.

Upon this he began to be disagreeably persistent, and declared that nobody had ever contemplated a long engagement; which is utterly untrue, since mother suggested that we should wait two years before we marry. We had plenty of money, he said, and what was there to prevent our being married before the summer was over?

"A great many things," said I. "But first and chief among them the fact that we are both much too feather-headed to take such an awful step as matrimony."

And then I reminded him how nice it is to be engaged; how much nicer for young people like us, than to be married and tied to each other in a sort of domestic bondage.

"Marriage is a capital institution for middle-aged and elderly people," said I. "The very best and brightest examples we have of married people are Baucis and Philemon, and Darby and Joan. Now you would not expect me to feel like Baucis."

"Baucis was young once," said he.

"Yes, and then no doubt she was engaged to Philemon, and he used to serenade her as you did me that night at Venice. Oh, it was lovely! You couldn't have serenaded your *wife*. You would have been indoors grumbling at her, more likely."

"Daisy, you are talking nonsense," said he sternly; and no doubt he spoke the truth.

"Oh, I am only pleading for youth and liberty—for the morning-hours of life," I explained. "While you are my *fiancé* you can go where you like, do what you like, and there is no one to find fault with you. If I were your wife I might feel offended at your going up to London so often, and coming home so late at night, and being a member of so many clubs. If I were your wife I might grumble at your accepting that invitation to Oxford for next week."

"Tell me to withdraw my acceptance, and it is done," he cried,

in his impulsive way. "I give you all the authority of a wife in advance. 'Being your slave what can I do but wait——'"

"Don't quote *that* sonnet," I said. "Everybody does. Quote something fresh."

He did not notice this impertinence. He was pacing up and down the room in a state of excitement.

"Your mother did not think like you, Daisy," he said. "She was only nineteen when she married."

"Ah, but then she adored my father," said I, without thinking what I was saying.

He stopped his impetuous perambulations, and walked over to me with a terrible countenance. He laid his hands upon my shoulders, and looked me in the face.

"Margaret Hatrell," he said, "do you mean what your words imply?"

"Do I mean that my mother was desperately in love with my father? Of course I do."

"And that you are not in love with me?"

"Not desperately in love. Oh! Cyril, don't look at me like that. You have no right to look so angry; you have no right to look so shocked and distressed. Did I ever tell you that I adored you? Did I ever pretend to be desperately in love? Never, never, never! I am not romantic or poetical as my mother was at my age. I have been taught differently. Your father trained my mind, and he did not make me romantic. It isn't in my nature to love any one as mother loved my father—at least, I think not."

A strange faltering stopped me as I said this; a curious dim feeling that there were hidden possibilities in my heart; dreams that I might have dreamt; feelings that would have brought my mind nearer akin to my mother's mind; if Fate had been different.

The look of absolute distress in his face made me unhappy, and I tried to make amends for my foolish, inconsiderate speech.

"Why should you be shocked because I am not romantic?" I asked. "I don't think you are a very romantic person either. We have known each other all our lives, and we ought to be very happy together by-and-by. Is not that enough, Cyril?"

"Not quite," he answered, graver than I had ever seen him until that moment; "but I suppose it is all I shall get, so I must be satisfied."

* * * * * *

Yesterday afternoon I amused myself with an exploration. I

was a lovely afternoon, almost summer-like, though we are still in the time of tulips and hyacinths, and the beeches have not yet unfolded their tender young leaves. Mother had gone to London with her husband to look at the drawing-rooms, which are receiving their finishing touches at the hands of the decorators, and I had all the day to myself. I spent the whole morning at my studies, working upon a synopsis of Duruy's history of the Greeks, which Uncle Ambrose advised me to write; firstly, to impress historical facts upon my mind; secondly, to cultivate style; and thirdly, to acquire the power of arranging and condensing a subject with neatness and facility. It is rather dry work, but I like it, and I adore the Greeks. I have been reading Ebers' Egyptian story between whiles, and I think that has helped me to realize the atmosphere of that bygone age when Pisistratus was ruling at Athens, and Crœsus was preaching platitudes upon his fallen fortunes at the Court of Amasis.

I finished my work before lunch, which is an absurd meal when mother is away—a mere scramble with the dogs, who come in to keep me company, and clear my plate under my nose. Directly after lunch I took up my hat to go out, whereupon Sappho and Phaon, my darling Irish setters, went mad, and nearly knocked me down in their delighted anticipation of a ramble with me.

We had explored every lane, copse, and common within four miles of River Lawn, so I wanted, if I possibly could, to give the dogs a change; and I thought I would venture to peep in at Fountain Head, where the shrubberies are full of primroses at this season.

The Fountain Head gardener and our under-gardener are great friends, and I have often talked to him when he has been in our grounds. I know the old housekeeper, too: so I had no compunction in opening a little gate in the shrubbery which gives on to the narrow lane that divides our property from Mr. Florestan's. There is a grand entrance on the Henley Road, and high iron gates, and a rustic lodge with a thatched roof and the dearest old chimney-stack. The gardener's family live in this lodge; but the big gate is only opened when Mr. Florestan is at home, and that is very seldom. He told me he meant to be oftener at Fountain Head in future. He feels himself growing too old for a roving life. I suppose he must be at least nine and twenty, which is certainly old compared with Cyril and me.

How nice it is to be young—to feel one's self quite young! and how sad it must be when weariness and age begin to creep over

one! I am miserable sometimes when I think that mother will grow old before I do—that I shall see the shadows stealing over that dear and lovely face—the shadows that foretell the end. Oh! that is the bane of life; that is what makes life not worth living—the knowledge that death is waiting somewhere on that road we know not—the grey mysterious highway of the future—waiting for those we love.

* * * * * *

The old shrubberies looked lovely in the afternoon sun, such a wild wealth of rhododendron and arbutus, and so many fine conifers half buried among the spreading branches, a tangle of loveliness, periwinkle and St. John's wort straggling over every bit of unoccupied ground. Phaon and Sappho rushed about like mad things, imagining all sorts of impossible vermin, and scratching and digging whenever they got out of reach of my whip. That dog-whip of mine looks formidable, but I'm afraid those two clever darlings know that I would not hurt them for worlds.

I had my pocket Dante with me, meaning to try and fancy myself in the pine forest near Ravenna, where *he* used to meditate, but the book was so far true to its name that it never left my pocket. I seemed to have so much to think about; and a spring afternoon, with light cloudlets floating in a pale blue sky, and the perfume of violets in the air, sets all one's most fanciful fancies roaming far and wide. I think my thoughts were light as thistledown or vanity that afternoon, or they could never have strayed so far; and yet there was a touch of sadness in them, for I could not help thinking of Gilbert Florestan and his melancholy position, quite alone in the world, mother and father both lying still and dumb, as my dear father lies in his grave under the willows—no sister or brother, no one to care for him or to lean upon him.

No doubt he has cousins, as I have. I have not quite made up my mind whether cousins are a necessary evil or a modified blessing. I'm afraid, if I stood alone in the world as he does, Dora and Flora would not fill a large gap in my life.

I rambled in the shrubberies and the dear old-fashioned gardens till I was tired, and then I began to feel the keenest curiosity about the inside of the house.

It is not a pretty house, but it is old and dignified. When one has come but lately from a city of palaces, one can hardly be altogether alive to the beauty of an old English mansion, with moss-grown walls and deep-set windows, and a general greyness and low

tone of colour which some people find dispiriting. Yet the house touched me by a kind of mournful beauty and a sense of quiet desolation, such as I felt only a few weeks ago when I looked at those old neglected mansions upon some of the smaller canals, so gloomy in their grandeur, as of the dead irrevocable past. I have felt sometimes as if I would give worlds to be able to buy one of those degraded, dilapidated old palaces, and to clear away all its parasite growth of petty modern uses, and to restore it to the splendour and the beauty of three hundred years ago. And yet I have shuddered at the thought of the phantoms that might come crowding round me in those great, grand rooms; of all the dead people who might awake at the sound of music and laughter in the home where they were once young and merry.

I walked up and down the broad gravel terrace in front of Mr. Florestan's house. It stands only about thirty feet above the level of the river bank, and a wide lawn slopes gently from the house to the river. I could see the boats going by, and hear the voices of the rowers, which were a relief after the uncanny feeling that had crept over me while I was in the great overgrown garden on the other side of the house. I believe the gardener must have given himself a holiday, for not a human creature did I see in the grounds.

There is a glass door opening on to the terrace, with an old-fashioned hanging bell. I ventured to ring that antiquated bell, trembling a little at the thought of ghosts, and perhaps a little at the thought that the old housekeeper would wonder at my wanting to explore her domain. The fancy had never come into my foolish brain before to-day; but I suppose that was because I had seen so little of Mr. Florestan until we met in Paris, and could not feel any particular interest in his house. Now that I know him, the house seems like an old friend, and I wonder that I can have looked so often at the old Indian-red roof and the great grey stone chimney-stacks without wanting to see what the inside is like.

No one answered my summons, though I heard the bell ringing with an awful distinctness. I rang again, but still there was no answer, though I waited long enough for the feeblest of old women to creep from the remotest corner of the rambling old house. I rang a third time, and still there was no reply, and the more I couldn't get in the more keenly curious I became. So at last, knowing old Mrs. Murdew would never resent any liberty on the part of my mother's daughter, mother being a power at Lamford, I tried the door.

It opened easily, and I went in, taking care to shut the door after me, so as to keep Phaon and Sappho outside. They were scampering about the shrubberies, and I knew they would find their way home when they missed me. I went in, feeling very much as Fatima must have felt; or, in other words, just a little ashamed of my idle curiosity.

The house is a dear old house, very shabby as to carpets and curtains, but with lovely old furniture of Sir Charles Grandison's period, and with old china in every corner, china which I feel assured must be worth a fortune: but I will never breathe a word about its value to Mr. Florestan, or he may pack it all off to Christie's. Men are such Goths where Wedgewood tea-pots and Worcester willow-pattern are in question.

Yes, it is a dear old house. It has an old, old perfume of rose-leaves and lavender, which must have been hoarded ever so long before Mr. Florestan was born, in all the old chrysanthemum bowls and hawthorn jars which stand about everywhere on the tops of cabinets and in corner cupboards, and in quaint little alcoves and recesses which one meets with unawares in the corridors and lobbies. Not all the wealth of the Indies could create such a house. It is the slow growth of time, like the golden brown lichens and cool grey mosses on the garden walls.

I roamed and roamed about the rooms on the ground floor, opening one into another, quaintly inconvenient, with queer little doors, half wainscot and half wall-paper; rooms without the faintest pretension to splendour or dignity; rooms that suggest the world as Miss Edgeworth and Miss Austen knew it; a world in which people dined at five o'clock, and danced country dances, and played on the spinet, and painted on velvet, and talked about the luncheon-tray and the Britska.

I looked at all the ornaments on all the tables and chimney-pieces, the things our grandmothers loved: cardboard hand-screens, with pencil landscapes—Craigmiller Castle, Guy's Cliff. Spill-boxes. What are spills, by the way, and why such a passion for boxes to accommodate them? Old albums and scrap-books, old work-baskets lined with faded satin. Everything was arranged as neatly as it had been fifty years ago, when Mr. Florestan's grandmother was mistress of the house, and these were her things, most of them. His mother's room had a more modern look; yet even there the books, desks, and work-boxes were old-fashioned. How quickly the fashion of this life passes away!

At first I was too much interested and amused to feel the uncanny influences of those deserted rooms, full of things that had belonged to people who were all dead; but presently that air of long-ago, together with the death-like silence of the house, began to affect my spirits. A feeling of profound melancholy crept over me. I thought of my dear, dead father; and wondered, as I have so often wondered, where the dead are; how near us, or how distant. I went back to the dining-room for a last look at the family portraits before leaving the desolate house. Mrs. Murdew had evidently gone out upon some errand, and there was no use in waiting for her return.

I looked with interest at the picture on the left of the sideboard, and near the door leading into the hall. It was the portrait of Mr. Florestan's father, a full-length painting, in a rough brown shooting suit, knickerbockers, and mighty hobnailed boots. A picturesque brown hat, a gun, and a liver-coloured pointer were the accessories of the boldly painted figure, against a background of russet foliage. The picture, which was by a master hand, might have been called a study in brown.

The likeness between father and son was remarkable. It might have been Gilbert Florestan's portrait that I was looking at. I studied the picture so long—fascinated by that wonderful slapdash power, the kind of painting which Ruskin describes as a rapid hand and a full brush—that the face seemed to grow into my mind, and the figure almost took life and motion as I looked at it. My nerves were in a peculiar state after that hour of silence and thoughtfulness in the desolate house, or else I could hardly have been so foolish as I was two minutes afterwards, when I turned to leave the dining-room, and shricked with terror on seeing a figure on the threshold of the door in the shadow of the half-closed shutters.

I was idiot enough to mistake the real for the unreal, the living son for the dead father. In that moment of terror I believed that the figure standing there looking at me with a quiet smile was the ghostly semblance of the man whose picture I had contemplated so long.

"Pray, forgive me for startling you," said Mr. Florestan, offering me his hand in the easiest way, and not allowing me to see that he thought me an idiot, as he must have done. "I ought to have given you some notice of my arrival. You were so absorbed in my father's picture that you did not hear his son's footsteps."

"I think it is the fault of that thick Turkey carpet rather than

of my abstraction," I told him; "but I really was absorbed in the picture, and envying the painter his power to get such a grand effect out of such simple elements. It is almost as fine as Gainsborough's blue boy. I had no idea you were coming to England so soon."

"I had no idea myself; but the distance from Paris to Lamford is such a bagatelle that I thought I might as well run across and have a look at the old home before all the tulips are withered. My mother used to be so fond of her tulips, though they were never a costly collection. A Dutch connoisseur would have laughed at our poor little show."

"Have you only just arrived?" I asked, feeling that I was redder than the reddest of the tulips, and wondering what he must think of my extraordinary intrusion.

"Within three minutes. The fly is still at the door, and my servant is bringing in my portmanteau."

"You must think it so strange to find me here," I stammered, feeling even worse than Fatima, though there were no gory heads lying about to add to my embarrassment.

"I only think it delightful to be welcomed by the presence of a friend," he answered, with inexpressible kindness.

There was something in his smile and in his tone of voice so full of protecting friendliness that I began to feel easier in my mind, and was able to explain my appearance in his dining-room on that particular afternoon; and then I told him that I must go and hunt for the dogs, who might be doing all manner of mischief in his shrubbery.

I had a secret conviction that the good creatures had gone peaceably home to the stables, but they afforded a decent excuse to get me out of the house.

"I feel sure they won't do the slightest harm," he said; "but if you are uneasy on that score we'll go and look for them together, and then perhaps your mother will take pity upon a tired traveller and give me a cup of tea."

"I am so dreadfully sorry," I said. "Mother is in London, and won't be home much before eight."

"That's a sad disappointment. I had looked forward to seeing her this afternoon."

We went out at the hall door together, and we explored the shrubberies and garden, but saw no sign of the dogs. He went home with me, and we found Sappho and Phaon in their kennels,

whither they had returned half an hour before. Then from the stableyard we wandered naturally to the garden, where the basket-chairs and tables had been set out on the terrace, in honour of the summery warmth of the afternoon. The footman came out with the tea-tray, and arranged it, while Mr. Florestan and I stood looking at the river.

Servants are so officious. I had happened to say at luncheon that if the day continued fine I thought I would have tea in the garden; and here was the man setting out the cups and saucers under Mr. Florestan's nose.

There was no help for it. I could not be so inhospitable as to send him away tea-less, with my pet brass kettle singing merrily over the spirit lamp, and my favourite buns frizzling fresh from the oven. I made the best of my awkward position.

"Perhaps, as mother isn't here, you'll allow me to give you a cup of tea," I said. He accepted eagerly. I almost hoped he'd take his tea standing, and go away directly he had emptied the cup. But, although he had been the soul of delicacy and consideration in his own house, he seemed to think he might do as he liked in ours. He seated himself in one of the low basket-chairs, and I felt that he meant to stay.

I dare say he thought it the most natural thing in the world, but I could not help feeling the strangeness of it, though Cyril and I had tea on the terrace *tête-à-tête* many a time before we were engaged, and Mr. Florestan is a good deal older than Cyril. So I tried not to look confused or silly as I poured out the tea.

"Please let me wait upon you," I said, when I saw him struggling out of the chair, the seat of which is only about a foot from the ground. "I know how tired you must be. Let me wait upon you just as if you were mother."

"The offer is too tempting. I own to feeling tired. I left Paris at eight o'clock, and that meant leaving my lodgings at seven. And the day was hot and dry and dusty. However, this garden and the river make amends for all I have suffered, and this toasted bun is better than the most famous of Bignon's *sautés*. Why do we waste our substance on Paris dinners, when tea and cake on a sunlit terrace are so much more delicious?"

"We cannot always have the terrace and the sunshine."

"Oh, but there is the winter fireside," said he. "Every one has a fireside. I am assured that epicurean dining is a mistake. A man left to his own devices usually dines on a mutton chop.

Gourmandism is mere swagger and rivalry. A Lord Alvanley, for a wager, invents a dish which shall be costlier than anybody else's dish; a fricassee composed of that particular morsel out of a fowl's back which epicures have christened the oyster. A hecatomb of chickens have to be sacrificed for a single fricassee; and Lord Alvanley goes down to posterity as the inventor of the costliest dish that was ever cooked since Vitellius and his nightingales' tongues. Almost all our dining in Paris is upon the same principle. We vie with each other in wastefulness, and restaurateurs grow rich."

It was a pleasure to hear him rattle on as he took his tea, devouring buns and jam-sandwiches, and seeming really to enjoy the meal. I was very soon as much at home with him as if he had been Cyril.

I told him about the house in Grosvenor Square, and we had a long discussion upon colouring and high art in furniture. I find that he inclines to the Italian school, and thinks that orientalism is a mistake in London.

"Your Persian lattices and Moorish divans imply perpetual sunshine, a lazy life, and a semi-tropical climate," he said. "They are mere foolishness in such a country as England. Were I furnishing a house in town, I would take a Florentine palace as my model. And so you are going to desert River Lawn in all its summer beauty for the starched stateliness of Grosvenor Square?"

I told him that the change was not my choice or my mother's, but that it was my stepfather who was shifting the scene of our lives. And then I was drawn on to tell him of my stepfather's dislike of the house which had been my father's home.

"I suppose it is a natural feeling on his part," I said; "he loves my mother so intensely that he cannot bear to see her in the home which her first husband made for her."

"Yes, it may be that such a jealousy is natural to some temperaments. Your stepfather is a peculiar man, a man of deep feeling, I fancy."

"Yes, that is quite true. He was devoted to my mother for years—all the years of her widowhood—before he took courage to ask her to be his wife. He is the most unselfish of men. He hardly made any use of his fortune until his marriage; but since he has been mother's husband he has spent his money like a prince."

"And you are to be his son's wife?" he said. "That will strengthen the bond between your mother and him."

His voice and manner changed curiously as he said this. No

one could have been gayer than he was five minutes before, when he was expatiating upon the merits of jam-sandwiches. No one could be graver than he was now.

I did not answer him. What could I say? My engagement is an accepted fact.

We were both silent, till I felt somebody would have to say something, so I said, rather stupidly, "Cyril and I have known each other since we were children. We are almost like brother and sister."

"Almost—with the difference of a wedding-ring," he answered, as he rose to say good-bye.

When he was gone I found he had stayed only twenty minutes, and I had two hours to dispose of before eight o'clock.

He came to see mother this afternoon, and they walked togcther on the terrace in earnest conversation for more than an hour. Unele Ambrose was over at the cottage, buried among his books. I was in the drawing-room, and I couldn't help feeling a little curious about what mother and Mr. Florestan could find to talk about all that time. I tried to practise, but found myself repeatedly running to the window to look at them.

He took leave at last without coming into the house to see me, which I thought was a little ungrateful on his part after my having given him tea yesterday afternoon.

"What secrets have you and your neighbour been talking, dearest?" I asked, when mother came slowly in at the drawing-room window, looking grave and thoughtful.

"Don't ask to know too much, my pet. We have been talking of a page in the book of the past. Nothing that touches my Daisy."

"You have been talking of my father?" I said.

She did not deny it.

I asked no more questions, knowing how easily she is saddened by any thought of the past. Yet I could not help wondering and wondering and wondering all day long what connection there could be between Mr. Florestan and my father's fate.

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May 30.—It is ever so long since I wrote the last line in my diary; and we have migrated to Grosvenor Square.

The house is lovely. Evcry detail that can minister to the comfort and convcnience of its inhabitants has been studied and thought out. My rooms are delicious,—colouring, form, everything in

excellent taste, outlook sunny, flowers in all the windows, brightness and prettiness everywhere,—and yet I find myself regretting River Lawn every hour of my life; and I have a shrewd suspicion that mother feels very much as I do. Already she has been talking about August, when we shall go back to Lamford.

The Drawing Room is for to-morrow, and my Court gown has come home from Madame Martinet's—a train of thick dull white silk, which falls in massive statuesque folds; a white satin petticoat covered with crystal beads, all one sparkle, dazzling, iridescent. The costume is a marvel of brilliant simplicity. Mother has given me the pearl necklace she wore at her presentation two and twenty years ago, and Uncle Ambrose has given me a set of diamond stars which are to fasten the ostrich plumes in my hair and on my shoulders. Cyril brought his offering this morning—a sapphire half-hoop ring—the second he has given me. The first was given me in Venice, where he bought it at one of the jewellers in the dear little Merceria—a double half-hoop of diamonds and rubies; so now I have the three colours, red, white, and blue, on my engaged finger. The rings are lovely, but almost too heavy a load for my poor finger to carry.

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June 1.—The awful ceremony is over, without any hitch, and I hope without any *gaucherie* upon my part. I have seen the face of Majesty, for mother and I were early at the Palace, and the Queen had not retired when our turn came. My gown has been admired, and is laid by in lavender, and I am now formally introduced to society, and have all the rights, privileges, and responsibilities of a young person who is "out."

Cyril is not to be allowed the splendours and luxuries of Grosvenor Square until after our marriage. His father thinks that as a bachelor he is better off in the Albany, where he has a delightful set of rooms, and where he may keep dogs, entertain his Oxford friends, and smoke as much as he likes.

If I were a young man with such advantages I should never want to marry.

My cousins have expressed themselves very decidedly about my future life in Grosvenor Square. They cannot believe it possible that any young couple could be happy under the same roof as their father and mother.

"I should prefer the shabbiest little flat in the Edgeware Road—nominally Hyde Park—to your splendid apartments," said Dora.

"The plan may answer very well in France. There is a kind of childishness about the French which makes them look up to their parents in a positively ridiculous way. But it will never do in an English household. Mark my words, Daisy, it will never do."

I told her that almost the chief consideration in my engagement to Cyril was the idea that I should not be parted from my mother when I became his wife.

"If that consideration influences you, my dear, depend upon it you don't care two straws for the man," she answered, in her horrid way.

I see a good deal of my cousins now I am living in town. They find Grosvenor Square nearer the Park than Harley Street, and often drop in to luncheon after their morning walk.

They walk in the Row in the morning, and ride before dinner, daily, as if it were a part of their religion.

"And yet," my aunt says, "I have not had one eligible offer for either of them."

I think there is something really pathetic in that "yet."

CHAPTER XV.

WHAT IS ROBERT HATRELL TO ME?

GILBERT FLORESTAN was among the idlers who sauntered in the Mall to watch youth and beauty go by on that particular afternoon when Margaret Hatrell made her curtsey to the Queen. He who was not usually a lounger in fashionable places, wasted a considerable time in waiting for Mrs. Arden's carriage; for although the ladies were early the gentleman's impatience made him earlier, and he had been standing about nearly an hour when the new, neatly appointed landau came in view, and he wasted another half-hour in loitering along with the slowly crawling line of carriages, and stopping to talk to Mrs. Arden and her daughter whenever there was an opportunity.

"I wanted to see you both in your Court plumes," he said, smiling at the two fair faces, framed in snowy feathers and flashing gems. "I could not conceive the notion of Miss Hatrell in a Court train."

"You should have come to Grosvenor Square for an early

luncheon, and then you might have seen the train," answered Clara.

"Oh, I can see it now, only it is transformed into a billowy background for the young ladies' throat and shoulders, like the wind-blown drapery of a water-nymph riding on a nautilus shell, as painters love to paint it. I assure you, Miss Hatrell, it is infinitely becoming."

"You have caught the tone of St. James's Park in the days of Steele and Addison," said Mrs. Hatrell.

"It is the influence of the *genius loci*. I feel as if I were one of the characters in 'Love in a Wood.' Ah, those gallant, tender, light-hearted days are gone, Mrs. Hatrell—the days when love and gallantry ruled the world—when battles were won and lost for a petticoat, and when half mankind lived and died for love. We are much wiser nowadays, and ever so much more prosaic. I am going back to my den in the Champs Elysées to-morrow. Is there anything in this world I can do for you in Paris?"

"Only to follow up the inquiry you began so successfully," Clara answered gravely.

"Be sure I will do my uttermost; but I fear the road has ended in a decided 'no thoroughfare.' And for you, Miss Hatrell—will you not entrust me with some little commission which shall be to me as a lady's glove in a knight's helmet? Have you no refractory shoemaker or dilatory glover on the other side of the Channel whom I may harry for you?"

"No, Mr. Florestan, mother and I are British enough to find all we want in London."

"Another instance of the degeneracy of the times. In Lady Mary Montagu's day, a man who went to Paris carried a string of delicate commissions from his fair young friends. The Parcel Post has demolished that particular branch of gallantry. I shall send you a box of chocolate caramels as a reward for good behaviour if you get yourself out of the Royal presence without tripping over your train. Good-bye."

He stood with his hat lifted as the carriage moved slowly on. They were close to the palace gates by this time.

"Why is he going back to Paris so soon, I wonder?" speculated Daisy, with a piteous little look which startled her mother by the suggestion of a danger that had never occurred to her before.

"My dear Daisy, he lives in Paris. What more natural than that he should go back?"

"Why should he prefer Paris to Fountain Head? It seems unreasonable."

"He will settle at Fountain Head by-and-by, no doubt, when he marries."

"Is he engaged to be married, do you think, mother?"

"I have no idea; but I think if he were engaged he would have talked about his fiancée."

"I don't know! Some men are so secret and reserved. Uncle Ambrose, for instance. See how he went on adoring you in secret for years."

"Mr. Florestan may have some attachment; but if he were engaged I think he would have spoken about his sweetheart. What does it matter, dearest? He is nothing to us except a friendly neighbour."

"No, only a friendly neighbour; but one wants to know all about him."

Gilbert Florestan went back to the bachelor lodgings and the bachelor life. He had stayed nearly three weeks at Fountain Head, and he had seen a good deal of Daisy and her mother, both before and after their migration. Grosvenor Square is within little more than an hour's journey from Lamford for him who will take an express train and a fast hansom, and Mr. Florestan had dined once and taken afternoon tea three times in the new house, and had happened to meet the two ladies at three different picture galleries on three different mornings.

He had studied Daisy's character and disposition as if she had been one of Shakespeare's heroines, and he found her perfect as Desdemona in her meek purity, spontaneous as Juliet in her girlish transparency of mind and soul. She was all this; but she was the plighted wife of another man, whom she no doubt adored. It was not because she was somewhat cold and careless in her treatment of her lover that she loved him the less, Mr. Florestan told himself. They had been companions from childhood, and love had become a matter of course.

He went back to Paris, where the season was still at its height, although the worldlings were beginning to talk of their favourite maladies, and to discuss Auvergne and the Pyrenees, Aix, and the Austrian Tyrol. Florestan in his present humour cared very little about fashionable society. He had his friends and companions in the world of literature and art, and in this particular world he tried

to discover the character and antecedents of Duverdier, the man he met in Madame Quijada's salon. He also made certain inquiries about Madame Quijada herself.

The ultimate result of a good deal of trouble was as follows:—M. Duverdier was not known to literature or art. The painters and literary men had never heard of him; but he was known as an habitué of the Boulevard Theatres, and of some of the fastest and most furious of the restaurants. He was said to be a Spaniard, and to have only appeared in Paris within the last two years; and yet this description of him seemed strangely at variance with his modes of speech, which were essentially argotic and Parisian, albeit that his accent was not Parisian. He was described as an idle visionary, with pretensions to be a man of science and an inventor, although he had never been known to take out a patent for so much as a new kind of corkscrew. He had been known also to dabble in mining speculations, and had more than once been obliged to swim for his life in troubled waters.

Of Madame Quijada nothing was known except that she had a beautiful daughter, whom she kept as close as a nun. It was supposed that there must be some one in the background, some one who kept dark, and who was the source of that magnificence in jewels and that luxury in hothouse flowers which contrasted so curiously with the lady's unpretending manner of life.

There was something in this little household of the Rue Saint Guillaume which interested Florestan, although he had not the slightest disposition to fall in love with the beautiful Dolores. He was interested in her only as a study in human nature, a leaf in the great book of humanity. For personal feeling he was more moved by the grey-haired, middle-aged cousin than by Madame Quijada's daughter.

He might have been still more interested in Louise Marcet could he have been present at an interview between her and Leon Duverdier, which took place on the morning of his return to Paris.

It was nearly a month since Duverdier's urgent application for a loan, and since his threat of suicide, a threat which he had no doubt forgotten five minutes after it was made. He walked into Madame Quijada's salon, unannounced, as usual, and found Louise alone, busy in the arrangement of the flowers, a duty which was always entrusted to her, and in which she exhibited an artistic taste.

A heavy Maréchal Niel rose dropped from her hands at the sight

of Duverdier, and she moved towards the door without a word, an expression of intense aversion upon her pale, rigid face.

"Stop," he cried, in a brutal tone. "You are the person I want to talk to this morning. I saw my aunt and Dolores get out of a fly and go into a milliner's in the Rue de la Paix, and I came here on purpose to see you. I won't stand being avoided as if I were a pestilence."

She stopped near the door, looking at him fixedly, but without uttering a word.

"What dumb devil has got into you?"

"I have nothing to say to you," she answered sternly; "I will have no dealings with you—will hold no intercourse with you. If you were dying of fever I would not give you a drink of water."

"You are a nice young woman to live in a Christian land; and yet I suppose you call yourself a good Catholic. Now, listen to me! You are a virago, and you are a monomaniac; but you have more hard common sense than your cousin or her mother, and you know that I am not a man to be trifled with. I must have twenty thousand francs before next Saturday. It is absurd for my aunt to make any difficulty about it. Old Perez is a gold mine; and she has only to put in her hand and take out as much gold as she wants."

"And you are despicable enough to trade upon your cousin's dishonour?"

"There is no dishonour in the question. I consider my cousin's position, as the adored—adopted daughter, let us say—of an old millionaire, eminently respectable. There are duchesses in Paris who are not half so virtuous. And if she is ashamed of her position it only remains with her to regularise it. The old fool would marry her to-morrow if she were not too stupid and too listless to bring him to the point."

"She hates that old man too intensely to tie herself to him for life—she is weary of her existence as his slave."

"Is she? Let her help me to make a fortune, then, and she shall be my queen. I only want a little capital to carry on experiments which must result in a mine of wealth—yes, as big a gold mine as old Perez has made for himself on the Bourse, and a more glorious fortune; for it will bring fame with it, the fame of the inventor. Tell her that I must have the money, Louise, or something desperate will come of her refusal to help me. I have tided over a month since I asked her for a loan, but I cannot go on much

longer. I am deeply in debt, and all the most precious things in my laboratory will be seized by my creditors, and that will mean utter ruin. Tell her she must help me—tell her when you are alone with her. Leave that old harpy, my aunt, out of the discussion. I know Dolores will find me the money if she is left to her own inclination."

"I will not be your intermediary. I will have nothing to do with you; and I only hope that Dolores will be wise enough to refuse you any further help. She must know that you have lied to her about your schemes and experiments, your speculations and wild dreams of wealth, not once, but many times. She must know that you have been leading an idle, profligate life in the very worst company in Paris, while you were pretending to be a genius and an inventor and to live only for science. She does not know as much about you as I do; but she must know that you are false to the core; she must know that you have traded upon her love for you, and will go on trading upon it to the end; that there is no baseness, no depth of shame, to which you will not stoop, to further your own base ends. She does not know what I know, that you are as cruel as you are mean and false."

The livid pallor of her hollow cheeks was intensified by the hectic spot which burnt upon the cheekbone, and gave an added lustre to eyes that had grown too large for the haggard face.

"Que diable!" cried Duverdier; "you are usually possessed by a dumb devil; but when you do talk, by Heaven! it is a torrent. No matter, I am not generally in need of an intermediary with a pretty woman, and I have no doubt I shall be able to come to an understanding with Dolores, before long."

This conversation took place in the morning. Gilbert Florestan called in the Rue Saint Guillaume on the following evening. He found Duverdier established in a *fauteuil* beside the sofa on which Dolores was sitting, looking very lovely in a flowing tea-gown of palest salmon silk, which set off at once the grace of her supple figure and a pendant and bracelet of magnificent sapphires. Florestan had never seen her wear these gems until to-night; and he guessed that they were a recent gift from her mysterious protector.

He pitied her all the more when he saw these new tokens of her slavery; for the wearer's eyes had a look of profound sadness, while the mother's cruel face was radiant with recent triumph. Louise Marcet was not in the salon. Duverdier was the only visitor when Florestan arrived, and he had a perfect consciousness that he was

not wanted by any one except Madame Quijada, who received him with marked *empressement*, and begged him to stop till eleven o'clock.

"I fear my salon is the dullest in all Paris," she said, "but you must remember that we are exiles, and have lived in the strictest retirement ever since we left Madrid."

Florestan protested that there was nothing he preferred to a small circle, society in which conversation really meant the interchange of thoughts. He talked of Madrid, a city in which he had spent three years of his diplomatic career, and although Madame Quijada evaded his questions with supreme ability, it was obvious to him that her knowledge of the Spanish capital was the knowledge of an outsider, and that she could never have occupied a good social position in that city.

"If she ever lived in Madrid, she lived there as she lives in Paris —as an adventurer and an outcast, outside the pale," he told himself.

Her refinement he believed to be the thinnest veneer, laid on in later womanhood. Her education was of the smallest; yet she contrived to discuss every subject that was mooted—political, social, or literary—with an aplomb which carried her further than the widest knowledge will carry a diffident conversationalist. Duverdier openly sneered at some of her observations, and provoked more than one vindictive glance from those southern eyes.

Dolores talked very little, and for the most part in confidential tones only meant to reach her cousin's ear.

Duverdier talked like a man who had seen the world of men and knew the world of books. All his ideas and theories belonged to the most advanced school. He looked forward to a millennium of science, a millennium of socialism, when the forces of nature should be the willing slaves of men, and hard work, the sweat of the labourer's brow, should be ancient history; an age when the governing powers of the world should be reduced to the lowest point, when armies and navies should have become a tradition of the Dark Ages, and the poverty and starvation of the vanished centuries should seem as mythical as the rape of Proserpine or the birth of Minerva.

He spoke with a suppressed boastfulness of a certain invention of his own which was fast approaching perfection, and which would revolutionize the coal mines of France and ultimately of the world; an application of electricity to the working of the mine and the carriage of the coal, which would minimize labour, and achieve in less than a month the results which now require a year.

Dolores listened with admiring looks and fullest faith in the

speaker. Madame Quijada looked the disbelief and aversion which she may have feared to express in words. Florestan felt that the atmosphere was charged with electricity, and that the storm might burst at any moment; yet he prolonged his visit till a few minutes after eleven, at which hour Duverdier made no sign of departure.

He determined to follow up his inquiries about this mysterious family until he should come at a clearer understanding of their position and history. The first point he had to discover was the identity of the unseen admirer who supplied the mother and daughter with their evidently ample means. He had considerable difficulty in sifting the various accounts that were offered of the secluded beauty. She had been seen in public just often enough to excite curiosity in that section of society which claims to be familiar with all the ramifications of the demi-monde, and she had acquired a kind of distinction by her retired life.

After hearing three or four different people mentioned as the hidden Crœsus whose purse paid for Dolores Quijada's jewels and other caprices, he was finally informed upon reliable authority that her protector was a certain Pedro Perez, a Spanish Jew, and the largest dealer in Spanish American securities upon the Paris Bourse. He was old and eccentric, of nervous temperament, and strange, solitary habits. He was said to be lavish in his generosity to Dolores and her mother, but was also said to be tyrannical in his exactions, insisting that the girl he admired should live like a cloistered nun, and promising to reward her by a large bequest, even if he did not make her his wife. Florestan's informant, whose knowledge was derived from the Spaniard's confidential clerk, added that if Dolores had cared to exercise her influence over the old man she might have easily brought him to the matrimonial point; but she hated Perez and was madly in love with a scapegrace cousin, upon whom she was reputed to have squandered a good deal of money, since without ostensible resources he had been able to meet his engagements on the Bourse after more than one unlucky venture.

Of Duverdier Florestan could learn nothing further. He lived on a fourth floor in a street near the Pantheon, and he dabbled in experiments in chemistry and electricity; but in spite of these scientific tastes he was said to be a shallow pretender, who had never brought the smallest scheme to a successful result.

"A man of schemes and dreams," said Florestan's informant; "an idle vagabond who is content to live upon women."

"An idle vagabond who is content to live upon women." Musing

over those words as he walked under the trees in the Champs Elysées on his way homeward, after a night at a Bohemian Club in the Boulevard Michel, Florestan was suddenly reminded of the story of Antoinette Morel and her brother, and the hundred-pound note.

Claude Morel, a chemist's assistant, alone in Paris with an only sister, whose heart was almost broken by the loss of her English lover.

Louise Marcet, a woman who in every look and accent bore the tokens of a great sorrow, might, allowing for the effect of grief and illness, be the age of Antoinette Morel, who would now be about forty.

What if he had stumbled accidentally upon the very couple of whom he was in quest? What if Leon Duverdier and Louise Marcet were Claude Morel and his sister Antoinette, hiding under changed names? The very fact of the altered names would be significant of evil, and would give rise to the darkest suspicions.

Claude Morel, a proscribed Communist, was known to have escaped arrest and to have fled to London with his sister after the last days of the Commune, and it was within a year and a half after the close of the Commune that Robert Hatrell was murdered by an unknown foreigner in a London lodging-house.

There was that in the countenance and manner of Louise Marcet which told of a more harrowing grief than an ordinary love affair which had ended in parting. She had the aspect of one over whose youth there had passed some great horror, a grief too terrible to be outlived or forgotten. Those premature grey hairs, the deep lines upon the pallid forehead, the sunken cheeks and haggard eyes were the lasting witness of an undying agony, and her horror of Duverdier had been expressed in an unmistakable manner on the night when Florestan saw her start up and leave the room at his entrance.

He remembered her extraordinary emotion upon hearing Miss Hatrell's name at the Opera, the keen interest with which she had looked at mother and daughter.

He had forgotten the incident until this moment, engrossed in far different thoughts, but it came back to him vividly to-night, and for the moment it seemed to him conclusive evidence of some past link between Louise Marcet and the name of Hatrell.

Yet, he reflected presently, the association might be of another nature than that which he imagined. The fact that Duverdier was an adventurer and a student of chemistry might have no bearing upon the existence of Claude Morel, the chemist's assistant of twenty

years before. The idea that Lonise Mareet and Leon Duverdier were brother and sister might be utterly without fonndation.

"At any rate I will try to pnt my suspicions to the test," he said to himself. "If Lonise Marcet is the emotional woman I take her to be, it will be easy to shake her firmness and to see behind the veil."

He determined to make an early opportunity of being alone with the strange, pale woman, whose nntold sorrow had touched him from their first meeting. He was haunted all through a wakeful night with shapes of horror—the phantasm picture of the murder in the shabby Bloomsbury lodging; the face of Leon Duverdier, cruel and callous, in the very act of murder; the face of Robert Hatrell, which he remembered in his boyhood—frank, open, attractive.

It was a mere chimera, donbtless, this wild fancy about Leon Duverdier, a nightmare dream engendered ont of the small social mystery of the Rue Saint Gnillaume—a very common story, after all, common as dirt. A wicked mother; a beantifnl girl sold like a slave in an Eastern market; wealth, lnxury, infamy, ennni, and vexation, jumbled together in two shameful lives, that did well to hide their dishonour from the world's ken. He had brooded too long over this commonplace domestic drama, and now he must needs try to establish a link between these three women and the murder in Denmark Street.

Foolish as the fancy might be, he meant to test it to the nttermost, and for this pnrpose went to the chief office of the criminal police of Paris early next morning, and contrived to get admitted to one of the heads of the department.

To this gentleman he recalled the circumstances of Robert Hatrell's murder.

"The mnrderer was supposed to be a Swiss," he said, "bnt that was a pnrely speculative idea, founded npon his statement that he was a journeyman watchmaker. One part at least of that statement, the assertion that he was employed by a well-known firm in Cornhill, was proved to be false. The name of Antoinette, which was nsed as a decoy to lure him to his death, is the name of a girl he knew in Paris. The girl's brother was known to be vindictively disposed towards him, although her relations with Hatrell were perfectly innocent, and he acted as a man of honour throughout. The mention of the girl's name is to my mind a conclusive proof that Claude Morel was concerned in the murder, if he was not the

actual murderer. I wonder that the attention of the French police was not called to this case, and that no effort was made to find the murderer upon this side of the Channel, seeing the large reward that was offered by Mr. Hatrell's widow."

"It was too soon after the Commune. We had our hands overfull at that time. The police of this city have only one fault, Monsieur."

"And that is?"

"There are not half enough of them. The French police are the most highly-trained body in Europe, yet crime stalks rampant in the capital from midnight till morning; the wolves so much outnumber the sheep-dogs. I own that it was an oversight on our part not to hunt down Claude Morel. His name was in the black book of the Commune for more than one petty villainy; but he slipped through our fingers, escaped the guns at Satory and the exportations from Havre. Had he paid the legal penalty for his offences his secret would have been safe in our hands. I suppose you know that it is our rule never to divulge the antecedents of a *forçat* who has served his time."

"That seems rather hard upon the non-criminal classes, who may ally themselves with an ex-felon for want of a knowledge of the past which would serve as a warning."

"I will not dispute that point, but it is a part of our code of honour. A criminal who is trying to recover his place in society has nothing to fear from us, so long as he leads an honest life. Claude Morel, however, belongs to another category. For the undetected felon we have no mercy."

"Will you do what you can to ascertain if he has been in Paris since '72?" asked Florestan.

"Yes, I will institute an inquiry—but a fox of that breed is good at winding and doubling, and not easy to hunt down. I do not think he would set his foot in Paris, after being concerned in more than one row that involved rapine and bloodshed, especially if he was afterwards implicated in a murder in London. He would be more likely to try the new world—America or Australia."

"He might keep away for a few years, and then venture back, emboldened by the passage of time. There is a man whose character and surroundings are an enigma to me, and whom I am most anxious to understand more clearly. I will pay the expenses of any investigation you may make into the existence of this person."

"Who is he?"

"He calls himself Leon Duverdier, but I have a shrewd suspicion that he is no other than Claude Morel. I wonder whether there is any one in your force who remembers Morel, and could identify him after a lapse of years?"

"There are plenty of men who were engaged in hunting down the Communists, but Morel was never a man of mark. I doubt if his personal appearance would be remembered by any of our men. You had better leave the matter in my hands for a few days, and I will see what can be done. You can get me the details of this London murder, and a report of the inquest, I suppose?"

"Yes, I have the newspapers with their report of the inquest and the inquiry before the magistrate. I will get all the particulars copied, and send you the copy. The Parisian police ought not to lose the chance of such a bonus as a thousand pounds."

On the following morning Gilbert Florestan was early on foot, sauntering in the neighbourhood of the flower-market near the Boulevard St. Michel. He had heard Madame Quijada say that her niece went every morning to the flower-market to make her own selections from the daily supply, and he relied upon meeting her there.

He was not disappointed. She made her appearance between eight and nine o'clock, very plainly dressed in a black merino gown and a black straw bonnet, and carrying a light basket on her arm. He waited about while she made her purchases, and when she had filled her basket, and was walking along the Quai in a homeward direction, he followed her and addressed her.

"Good morning, Mademoiselle Marcet. I hope you are not in a hurry this morning," he said, walking by her side.

She looked round at him with an apprehensive air, and quickened her pace.

"I have always a great deal to do of a morning," she answered quickly. "Yes, I am rather in a hurry."

"Not so much so as to deny me ten minutes' private conversation, I hope," he said. "There is something about which I want to talk to you most particularly—something which dates from the evening we met at the Opera, when you saw Robert Hatrell's widow in the stalls."

Her pale face flushed for a moment or so, and then grew paler than before. He had no doubt of the emotion caused by the mere sound of the murdered man's name.

His intention had been to ask her to walk as far as the Luxem-

bourg Gardens with him, so that he might have leisure and quiet for serious conversation, but he saw such avoidance and apprehension in her manner that he deemed it wiser to come to the point at once. There were not many people upon the Quai at this hour, and he came to a standstill near a display of shabby second-hand literature, and stood there quietly expectant, while Louise Marcet dropped her basket of flowers and leaned against the stone parapet, pallid and trembling, almost as if she were on the point of fainting.

"His name moves you now as it moved you then," he said earnestly, laying his hand upon her arm as it hung by her side, while she leaned with the other elbow upon the stone slab. "I am assured that you could throw a new light upon his cruel death; that it is in your power to bring about the discovery of his murderer."

"I don't know what you are talking about," she said. "Who is Robert Hatrell—and what is Robert Hatrell to me?"

She pronounced the name with difficulty, but she pronounced it more correctly than a Frenchwoman would have pronounced an English name unheard before.

"Robert Hatrell is a man who was lured to his death by a woman's name, and that name was yours!" said Florestan, with conviction, holding her arm in his strong grasp, looking straight into her eyes, which tried in vain to evade that direct gaze. "But for his regard for you, his fidelity to a tender memory, he would never have been tempted into the house where he was slaughtered. That house was a *guet-apens*, and you were the assassin's lure—and if that assassin was your brother, it is not the less your duty to denounce him. So cold-blooded a murderer deserves no mercy even from his nearest of kin."

"I don't know what you are talking about," she repeated doggedly, with trembling lips.

"Oh, but you do, you do—every line in your face acknowledges what your lips deny. You think it is a sister's duty to shield a brother, to be dumb or to lie in his defence, even when that brother is little better than a beast of prey. You shrink from him with undisguised loathing, you will not stay in the same room with him, yet you allow your cousin to waste her love upon him, and you do not warn her that the man with whom she associates in confiding affection has the heart of a tiger, and would stop at no crime that would serve his own interest. You know what he is, and you know, by the light of the past, what may be expected of him in the future.

Do you think that the Denmark Street murderer is a man to stop at his first crime, or at his second? Given such a nature as that, and the occasion will give birth to the crime."

"You talk in riddles—in riddles," she said helplessly, looking from side to side like a wild animal at bay.

"You refuse to trust me? You deny that your real name is Antoinette Morel, and that you are the sister of Claude Morel, the Communist?"

"My name is Louise Marcèt."

"Very well, remember I have warned you. In Claude Morel's first crime you were only the decoy. Who knows? In his second you may be the victim."

CHAPTER XVI.

FRENCH LEAVE.

GILBERT FLORESTAN, who had not been remarkably energetic in the pursuit of any ambition or fancy of his own, could but wonder at the intensity which moved his thoughts and his actions in the pursuit of that investigation which Mrs. Arden had confided to him. He could think of nothing else, undertake no other occupation; and when his thoughts were not fixed upon Leon Duverdier and his supposed sister they were on the other side of the Channel, haunting River Lawn, or a certain house in Grosvenor Square, and following one particular girlish figure with an alarming persistence.

He wanted to do the thing which Mrs. Arden had given him to do; he wanted to prove how difficult a task he could accomplish in order to lessen the sorrow of her life; but even if he should succeed in bringing Robert Hatrell's murderer to his doom, and in lightening the anguish of the wife who lamented his dark fate—all the more acutely because it was unavenged—would this great service done for Robert Hatrell's widow bring him any nearer to Robert Hatrell's daughter? Alas! no, he told himself. That young heart was given to another; that young life was pledged. Nothing he could do would bring him any nearer to Daisy. He could never be more to her than he had been that sunny afternoon on the terrace by the river, when the uneasy look in the lovely hazel eyes had told him that she wished him away. She had always been kind and courteous to him; but he was a nullity to Cyril Arden's future wife. It may be that her woman's wit had guessed his secret, and

that she was nervous and uneasy at any chance *tête-à-tête*. He had assuredly perceived something in her manner which a very vain man might have interpreted as the indication of a hidden preference, a growing regard against which she struggled, in duty bound to another.

"Why are mothers in such a hurry to give away their daughters' future lives?" he asked himself, not knowing that Daisy had accepted her old playfellow of her own free will, pledging herself almost unawares, with that girlish lightness which disposes of women's lives in a breath, for good or for evil.

He felt that his case was hopeless, and yet it was something to him to be able to devote himself to Mrs. Arden's service, to feel that there were confidence and friendship between him and Daisy's mother, friendship which would at least give him an excuse for seeing Daisy now and then and making himself a little more unhappy.

Hopeless lovers cultivate the weed unhappiness as if it were a flower.

Florestan had no more doubt that Madame Quijada's niece was Antoinette Morel than he had of his own identity. Her denial was in its mode and manner quite as good as a confession. He read the report of the inquest for a third time, and subsequent paragraphs describing the cashing of the bank-notes at Cannes and at Monte Carlo, and he was strongly inclined to believe that the elderly and aristocratic Frenchwoman who changed the notes was no other than Madame Quijada. True that the elderly lady's white hair was a point in the description, while the Spanish lady's hair was still black, but it would be only natural that a woman entrusted with such a critical mission would do her utmost to hide her identity. True also that the elderly lady was described as having a mole over the left eyebrow, while Madame Quijada showed no such mark; but it was by no means unlikely that the mole was an artificial disfigurement devised to divert suspicion from the lady hereafter.

Was it the same woman who stopped Robert Hatrell in Cranbourne Street and who appealed to him on behalf of the dying Antoinette? Yes, Florestan thought, the same; although the woman in Cranbourne Street was described by Colonel Macdonald as middle-aged. And if this were so, Madame Quijada had been her nephew's aider and abettor in a diabolical murder.

Would Antoinette, otherwise Louise, warn her aunt of his

suspicions? He determined to appear in the lady's salon on her next evening, in order to discover, if it were possible, what confidences had passed between the aunt and niece. His own idea of the situation was that the younger woman existed in her aunt's house only on sufferance, and that there was suspicion on the one side and loathing on the other.

He spent only half an hour in the Rue Saint Guillaume. Louise was absent from the salon, suffering from a neuralgic headache, her aunt told him. Dolores looked pale and preoccupied. There was no change in her mother's manner, and Florestan concluded that Louise had told her nothing. There was no other visitor, and the dulness of the salon was oppressive.

Before he left, he contrived, in the most casual way, to ask an important question.

He commented in a sympathizing tone upon Mademoiselle Marcet's delicate appearance and weak health, and then he asked abruptly—

"How long is it since she had that serious illness of which you told me?"

"A good many years; I really don't remember how many," replied Madame Quijada, carelessly.

"Oh, mother, you can't forget the year," cried Dolores, who had been yawning behind her fan. "It was in '72, the year we went to Madrid."

The year of Robert Hatrell's murder. This answer settled two points: Antoinette's illness, and the establishment of Madame Quijada at Madrid, had been events of the same year. The horror of Claude Morel's crime had been the cause of his sister's brain fever. The proceeds of the crime had enabled Claude Morel's accomplice to establish herself in the Spanish capital. Doubtless it was to Spain that the murderer had betaken himself, thinking it a safer refuge than the new world. His southern birth had made it easy for him to pass as a Spaniard.

Florestan felt that he was getting the threads of the tangled skein into his hands. He called on the following day at the headquarters of the Police de Sûreté, and was again admitted to the important official to whom he had confided his suspicions of Duverdier.

"I have read the story of Mr. Hatrell's murder," said this functionary, after receiving him with grave politeness, "and I agree with you that the name of Antoinette, employed as a lure, goes very near to fix the murder, or, at any rate, complicity with the

murder, upon Antoinette's brother. Yet you must bear in mind that there are always remote possibilities in every case, and the obvious solution of a mystery is not always the right solution. It is possible that Mr. Hatrell may have talked of this youthful love affair, and that the name of his sweetheart may have been known to others besides her brother."

"No other man would have had the same malignant feeling to prompt the crime," suggested Florestan.

"A crime which was to realize a gain of nearly four thousand pounds would need no prompting from sentiment or revenge. How can you account for Morel's precise knowledge of Mr. Hatrell's movements? Was he in frequent communication with Hatrell at this time?"

"I should say decidedly not; but I have no absolute knowledge upon this point."

"Then in all probability he was in communication with his sister's former lover. It would be only natural for a man of that kind to try and trade upon his knowledge of the past."

"I have to remind you that Mr. Hatrell's relations with the French girl were perfectly innocent."

The official, who had grown grey in the experience of the worst society in Paris, shrugged his shoulders, and expressed all the doubt which an elderly and astute visage can express.

"Will you vouch for that fact?" he asked.

"Yes. I have it upon the evidence of the girl's own letters, and from the lips of a worthy old lady in whom she confided."

"Granted, then, that the intrigue was an innocent entanglement, mild as rose-water, Mr. Hatrell may yet have desired to keep the story from his wife, and may have allowed Claude Morel to hang upon him, and may thus have given him the opportunity to find out all about the intended visit to the bank, and the sum to be handed over in the lawyer's office."

"It must have been so. The movements of the murderer were too precise to have been guesswork or the result of accident. The murderer must have had detailed information as to Mr. Hatrell's intended movements on that fatal day. That is the most mysterious point in the story."

"Not very mysterious if Claude Morel were in frequent communication with Mr. Hatrell."

"Would Hatrell confide in a man who was sponging upon him, a man he must have despised?'

"Perhaps not; but Mr. Hatrell's servants might furnish the information."

"Servants would hardly have known the precise facts."

"My dear sir, servants know everything. You English have a pernicious habit of discussing your most private affairs at the dinner-table. The people who wait upon you hear and remember. However, this is beating about the bush. I have something to tell you as the result of the inquiry that has been made since you were last in this room."

"You have discovered the identity of Morel and Duverdier?" exclaimed Florestan, eagerly.

"Not conclusively; but we have discovered that Duverdier is a man of the worst possible reputation—to have escaped deportation to New Caledonia. We have discovered that, on the strength of good looks and consummate audacity, he has managed to live for the last seven years in Madrid and Paris. Of course what we know of him in Spain is at present only at second-hand; there has been no time for any direct inquiries in Madrid. We cannot hear anything about him except that he was known to the Spanish police as an adventurer, and under suspicion of having been concerned in a great jewel robbery at Madrid six years ago. I have despatched my agent to that city, and he may be able to get more details on the spot. In the mean time there is one fact that tells strongly against M. Leon Duverdier."

"And that is——"

"He has made off. He has scented danger, I believe, and has disappeared from Paris before he could be asked any inconvenient questions."

"Is that really so?"

"Yes. After I had read the account of the Denmark Street murder, I had a desire to look at this Duverdier whom you take for Morel. I was told that he occupied an apartment in the Rue Soufflot, so I put on one of the numerous disguises in which I pay visits of this kind, and in the character of a septuagenarian savant I sallied forth to call upon the experimentalist and inventor. I know enough of chemistry to sustain a conversation with as shallow a scientist as I take Duverdier to be. However, my capacity in this line was not put to the test. The concierge informed me that M. Duverdier had left for Brussels upon the previous evening, and that he had no idea when he would return. He had left the key of his apartment with the concierge, and at my request the man

went upstairs with me and allowed me to investigate the deserted rooms."

"Did you make any discoveries?"

"Nothing of an incriminating nature. Two of the rooms are furnished with a showy vulgarity which bespeaks the tiger—velvet and gilding, photographs of actresses and demi-mondaines, a great display of pipes, foils, and boxing-gloves. A third and larger room is fitted roughly as a laboratory, and bears indications of recent experiments. I asked the concierge if M. Duverdier's departure had been long in contemplation, and he told me that the first he had heard of the intended journey was the order for a cab to take Duverdier and his portmanteau to the station. He gave no date for his return, but said that he should not be long absent, and begged the man to look after his rooms while he was away. The concierge doubted if any of the furniture had been paid for, and anticipated a descent of the sheriff during the tenant's absence."

"Did you hear anything of Duverdier's habits?"

"Nothing to distinguish him from the common run of profligates and spurious savants. Late hours, and importunate creditors; occasional visits from mysterious women, who came closely veiled and shunned observation; rare intervals of seclusion and work in the laboratory. I could see that he was not a favourite with the concierge, and that if there had been anything damaging to tell about him the man would have told it."

"He has been warned by his sister," said Florestan, after a thoughtful silence. "I showed my cards too soon."

He told M. Jaluc of his interview with Louise Marcet.

"Yes, that was a mistake—although the interview may have gone far to confirm your suspicion. No doubt she told her brother that you were on the scent; and Morel, *alias* Duverdier, has disappeared for an indefinite period. He would have no hesitation in leaving a city where he was deeply dipped, and which he might not be allowed to leave if he lingered much longer."

There was no more to be said. Whatever ideas M. Jaluc had as to the possibility of any satisfactory solution of the mystery of Robert Hatrell's murder, he did not impart them to Florestan, but simply took that gentleman's cheque for the expenses incurred in the inquiries and investigations that had been made at his request, and said that "for the rest, time would show."

"If this Duverdier is as black a villain as you believe him to be—or, in other words, if he is the Denmark Street murderer, he will

be sure to put his neck under the knife. No such man stops at a single crime."

"He is a man to be watched, then," said Florestan.

"Yes, he is a man to be watched; and I believe he will prove a man worth watching."

CHAPTER XVII.

DAISY'S DIARY IN LONDON.

It was an old fancy, and one which had haunted me from the first night I slept in Grosvenor Square. As I laid myself down to rest in the pretty little bed, with its embroidered Japanese coverlet and cloud of creamy lace—all devised by mother, so dainty and gracious—and as I heard the noise of the carriage wheels, like the great hoarse roar of the sea, I said to myself, "This is London, cruel London, the city in which my father was lured to his death—the city in which a good man may be murdered in broad daylight, on a summer afternoon, in the midst of his fellow-men."

I could not sleep that first night for thinking of my dear dead father. I could not stop myself from picturing the awful scene, over and over again—the ghastly change in the dear face—the horrid wound—the pitiless murderer, whose face I could not picture to myself.

Again and again and again I tried to shape that unknown face. I thought of all the villainous countenances I had seen in picture galleries—of this or that Judas, this or that murderer—the malignant face with dull red hair; the swarthy face with close-cut black hair; the rugged features and beetling brow; the low, scarcely human forehead, under ragged tangled locks; all of the villainous and inhuman that painters have ever conceived; yet I could never picture to myself the form and face of the man who killed my father.

Night after night I have lain awake thinking of him. My father has been much more often in my thoughts since we came to London than he was while we were at peaceful River Lawn, where I used to lie awake to hear the nightingales in the warm June nights, and where the sound of the river always soothed me like a lullaby. Here all the gaiety and splendour, the operas and plays, the music and dancing, and talk and laughter, are not enough to make me forget that in this city my father was murdered. If there were no

such wilderness as London he might be living and among us to-day. He might be ours for many a year to come.

I think of Professor Palmer in the desert, lured to his fate by murderous Arabs. Was the desert worse than London? I think of all who have ever been treacherously slain in wild and lonely places, but I can think of no place worse than London.

I want to see the house in which my father died. I want to see the room in which he was found lying stabbed to death.

This is the fancy that has tormented me ever since we took up our abode in London, ever since the roll of the wheels and the tramp, tramp, tramp of horses' feet have been in my ears. I feel as if I should think less of him, and be less haunted by the dreadful vision of that room, if I could once see it in all its sordid reality, if I could know exactly what it is like.

I have told Cyril my feelings on this point, but he refuses to take me to see the house, or even the street in which my father died. He cannot understand me. He cannot understand that this dreadful sensation of being haunted nightly by the vision of the deed and the room might be lessened by familiarity with the actual scene, however painful the sight of that horrible place might be.

I have entreated him to take me there, but he steadfastly refuses, so I have made up my mind to go there without him. Mother and her husband are going to a grand dinner this evening, to meet Royalties; Cyril has gone to Oxford to dine with the Bullendon Club. I shall have the evening all to myself, and I shall go to Denmark Street alone.

I suppose it is rather an awful thing for a girl of my age to go out after eight o'clock, and I have never been in the streets of London by myself at any hour; but I don't care to take even my good Broomfield, for she would most likely make as many objections as Cyril, and I might fail in getting inside the house I want to see. I would rather depend entirely upon my own cleverness.

I know the number of the street; I know the position of the room; I know that it is a street of lodging-houses, so I can very easily make believe to be in search of lodgings. I shall wait till the carriage has driven off with mother and Uncle Ambrose, and then I shall send down word to the butler that I have a headache and won't dine. I shall tell Broomfield that I am going to lie down for an hour or two, upon which I know the dear soul, after having fussed about me with eau-de-cologne and sal-volatile, and arranged my pillows and reading-lamp, will go down to the servants' hall at

the very bottom of the house, and will be absorbed in gossip till my bell rings.

I know where Uncle Ambrose leaves the latch-key which he always uses when he comes in from a walk, so I can let myself in as quietly as I let myself out. Our hall and staircase, when the heads of the family are out, might for silence and solitude as well be in the sepulchre of one of the Pharaohs.

I shall put on my very plainest cloth gown, and a shabby little garden hat, so as to look like a work-girl, or anything common or insignificant.

I have seen that dreadful room—a commonplace, ill-furnished room in a shabby lodging-house, and the sight of it will haunt me to my dying day. Cyril was right and I was wrong. It was a senseless thing to do, and I ought to have left it undone.

Everything happened as I hoped. The pretended headache did me good service. I was mistress of my time and actions before nine o'clock. I slipped off my tea-gown and dressed myself for the character of a young woman in search of a respectable lodging at seven shillings a week. I suppose that is about the price work-girls pay.

The evening was gray and dull, not dark, but thick and heavy, with an oppressive feeling in the atmosphere, as of stored-up heat and dust—such a different atmosphere from the cool dewy air in the garden at Lamford on a midsummer night.

I had studied the map of London, and had carefully made out my way to Denmark Street, but seeing a benevolent-looking old cab-man, with a red nose, creeping along close to the curb in Grosvenor Street, I hailed him, and told him to drive me to St. Giles's Church.

"So I will, my dear, and I wish I was going to drive you there to be spliced," he said, which shows how thoroughly common I must have looked in my garden hat; or it might be that the old man had been drinking, for he rattled the cab over the stones, and zig-zagged across the road in a really dreadful manner. If I had not been full of other thoughts, I believe I should have feared for my life, especially when he took me round corners.

He drew up in front of a church, in a shabby-looking street, where there were shops still open, though it was after nine o'clock. I gave him half-a-crown, which he did not seem to think enough.

"Do you want me to wait for you, miss?" he asked. "You won't get another cab in this neighbourhood."

I said no, for I was shaken dreadfully by that one ride, and I felt it would be tempting Providence to let the red-nosed cabman drive me again.

My heart was beating so violently that I hardly knew what I was doing: but I began telling myself to be calm and collected, and to remember that I was there in opposition to Cyril's advice, and that I must prove worthy of my own self-confidence.

I am not a fainting young person, indeed I never fainted in my life; but last night I was afraid that I was going to faint, and I had to struggle against a swimming in my head, and a painful sense of lightness which made me totter a little as I turned into Denmark Street.

It was very quiet there. The street had a sober, old-fashioned air, which would have given me confidence if I had really been a hard-working young woman in search of a lodging. Some of the houses looked the picture of neatness; others were shabby and squalid. Against every door I observed a row of brass bells, which showed that there were several tenants in each house.

I saw the number I was in search of from the opposite side of the way. There was the tailor's workshop which I had read about in the newspaper. The windows were wide open, and half a dozen men were at work in a glare of gas. I could not help thinking they looked like lost souls in Pandemonium—the bare, dusty room, the glare and heat, on this summer night, when the stars were shining on all the flowery creeks and willowy islands near Lamford, when life and the world were so lovely for some people.

Yes, that was the tailor's workshop, and it might have been one of those men who heard my father's murderer go singing down the stairs, fresh from his deed of blood. I think the idea of that, and the horror of it, braced my nerves, for I felt less like fainting as I crossed the road and knocked at the door of the fatal house.

I waited for some minutes before any one came to the door, though I knocked a second time. Then a woman appeared, an elderly woman, who looked at me curiously.

I told her I wanted a lodging—a respectable room at seven shillings a week; but she answered rather sharply that she only let lodgings to men—why prefer men, I wonder?—and she was going to shut the door in my face, when I grew desperate, and stopped her by laying my hand upon her arm.

"There was a murder eight years ago in this house," I said.

"Let me see the room where it was done, and I'll give you seven shillings."

I would as soon have offered her a sovereign, but I had got the sum of seven shillings in my mind in connection with the rent of a lodging, and I offered her that amount unthinkingly. It was enough, however, for she snapped at my offer.

"Come in," she said, looking at me very hard and very suspiciously all the time. "That's a curious fancy of yours. You haven't anything to do with the murderer, I hope?"

"No, no, no," I cried.

"I'm glad of that," said she. "Ah, he was a devil, that man—a smooth-faced, smooth-tongued devil. The sight of him and the sound of his voice makes me sick and faint whenever I call him to mind. He put a blight upon me and on my house. I've never been the same woman since."

I asked her what the man was like, finding that she was willing to talk, and she described his appearance in a great many words, but her words did not conjure up any distinct image.

He was good-looking and he was young. She did not take him for much over thirty. He was dark, with fine black eyes, and he wore a moustache, but no beard. He talked English, but he spoke like a foreigner. This was all I could gather from her.

She went slowly up the stairs before me, with a paraffin lamp in her hand, and she flung open the door of the back room on the second floor and told me to go in, holding up the lamp on a level with her head so that I might see the room.

"I've kept it just as it was that day," she said. "I've never had a good let in all the eight years—not a permanency. There's a blight upon the room; but people come and look at it, as it might be you, and give me a trifle."

"Oh, how horrid of people!" I said, forgetting myself; "how can they be so morbid?"

"Not more so than you, miss. It's human nature," she answered.

I looked at the room—a square, common-looking room, with very shabby furniture, and a single window looking out upon roofs and chimney-stacks. All looked dark and dreary—the light of the flaring lamp only made the squalid furniture seem more squalid. Oh, what a scene to meet those dying eyes! What horror in that one agonizing moment to feel himself caught like a snared bird, trapped in such a hole as this! "How did he look? where did you find him lying?" I asked; and then she described that ghastly

sight, showing me the spot where our dear one lay, gloating over every detail.

I could have shrieked with agony as I listened to her. She had put down her lamp on the table, and she clawed my wrist with her skinny fingers as she pointed with the other hand to the floor, and she acted over all the scene, "as it might be here," "as it might be there," and she dwelt upon the look of the dead face when they lifted him from the floor and laid him on that wretched bed, until my heart seemed to turn to stone.

I could not speak. I just let her go on. I had so wanted to know all—all that the commonest lips could tell—all, from any source, however cruel. I let her talk on to her heart's content, like a ghoul as she was; and then I went with her downstairs somehow, quite numbed and cold, as if I had been in a nightmare dream, and I went out into the dark street.

I made up my mind to walk home. I felt the air and exercise would give me my only chance of getting calm after the agony of that quarter of an hour. I walked on blindly for some distance, first in one street and then in another, going out of my way, I believe, yet vaguely making for the West. I had lost all sense of time, and when I heard a church clock strike and counted the strokes I was surprised to find that it was only ten.

It was almost immediately after this that I came into a long, shabby-looking street, which looked so empty and desolate that I felt as much alone in it as if I had been walking in one of our Berkshire lanes. There was only one lighted spot in the street, and that looked like an hotel or a restaurant.

It was a restaurant, and as I got nearer on the opposite side of the street I saw the name—

RESTAURANT DU PAVILLON

I was walking slowly, meaning to ask the first policeman I met to put me in the right way to Grosvenor Square, and not caring even if I went out of my way, for the cool air and the movement were helping me to recover my calmness, when three men came pouring out of the lighted doorway, talking and laughing in a boisterous kind of way that made me think they were tipsy. One of them saw me, and called out something to his friends in French, to which the others replied in the same language, but I could not understand a word they said. I hurried my steps, and tried to get out of their reach, but the man who had spoken first came across

the road and began to talk to me, in English this time, asking me where I was going, and whether I would go to a music-hall with him and his friends.

I cannot record the horrid tone and manner of the man. I hate to remember his vulgar insolence. I hate to think that there are such men in the world, and that poor, hardworking girls such as I was supposed to be, are exposed to the insolence of such creatures, and have such hateful words forced upon their ears as they go quietly home from their work. The wretch caught hold of my arm, and urged me to go with him to some place which he called "The Oxford," while his friends, who spoke only in French, laughed boisterously, and talked of my affected prudery.

I was furious. I shook myself free from the wretch's touch, and I looked up and down the street in despair for some one who would help me.

"How dare you speak to me or touch me, you odious creature?" I cried; and then he took off his hat, in mocking acknowledgment of an imaginary compliment. I saw in the light of the lamp close above us that he had an olive complexion, like an Italian's, and black eyes, and I remembered with a shudder the woman's description half an hour before.

There must be thousands of such men among the exiles who come to London for refuge; yet I shall never see such a face without recalling the unknown image of my father's murderer.

He pretended to think that my anger was only assumed, and went on with his hateful compliments and offers of supper and champagne at the Oxford, and I saw in my despair that there was not a mortal in sight to whom I could appeal for protection.

The door of the restaurant stood open, and I could see lights and servants moving about inside. I had half a mind to rush across the street and go in at the open door, where no doubt some one would have taken my part against these horrid men. But my courage failed me in the next instant. It would have been such a wild thing to do, and how could I have faced half a dozen astonished waiters in the glare of that gaslit vestibule?

I looked down the street again, and this time there was a promise of rescue in the shape of a hansom cab coming along rapidly, with two great flaming lamps, like a dragon with fiery eyes, the good dragon that comes to rescue forlorn damsels—not to eat them.

I ran into the road and hailed the driver, without stopping to see

if the cab were empty. While I waved my hand in frantic appeal —how ashamed of myself I feel to-day when I have to write about it in this cold-blooded journal!—somebody inside the cab dashed his stick up through the little trap-door in the roof, just as frantically. The driver pulled up sharp, and a big, middle-aged man got out of the cab and came to me.

How thankful I felt that he was so big and so middle-aged! I felt the utmost confidence in him, almost as if he had been my uncle.

"Is there anything the matter?" he asked, looking at my persecutors.

"Yes," I answered, "one of these men has been horridly rude to me. They have all been rude, but that one," I pointed to my worst tormentor, "has been the most offensive."

"He will not be offensive any more, unless he wants to be thoroughly well kicked," said my friend, and he looked as if he would like to do it.

"Please don't take any trouble about him," I said; "he is tipsy, I believe, and he is really not worth kicking. He wouldn't know anything about it afterwards, so it would be wasted trouble. If you would oblige me so far as to give me your cab—you would be able to get another one very soon, I suppose—I should be deeply grateful."

I had seen that he was not in evening dress, or I should have hardly ventured to make such a selfish request.

"My cab is quite at your service. Where shall I tell the man to drive you?"

"To Grosvenor Square. My name is Hatrell—Miss Hatrell."

I repeated the name very distinctly, for I wanted my unknown friend to understand that I was not ashamed of myself, although he found me in such a disagreeable position.

Two of my assailants had sneaked off already, with a laugh, and an air of being quite at their ease; but my chief tormentor stood as if he were glued to the pavement, staring at me in a dull and stupid way, while I got into the cab, and shook hands gratefully with my nameless friend. He had been noisy enough a few minutes before, when he was doubtless in the loquacious stage of intoxication; but now he seemed to have passed into a silent and stony stage which was like absolute stupefaction.

One of his friends turned to look after him, when they had gone some little way ahead.

"Holà, Duverdier! Veux tu te planter là toute la nuit?" he called out.

So my tormentor's name is Duverdier?

I stopped the cabman at the corner of the square, paid him to his perfect satisfaction, for I just emptied the silver in my porte-monnaie into his hand, and walked quietly to our own door, where I let myself in like a thief in the night.

CHAPTER XVIII.

DAISY'S DIARY.

How full of strange coincidences this life is! It is a small thing, of course, but still it has vexed and worried me more than I can say. This morning, the second after my wretched adventure in Church Street, I heard a most hatefully familiar voice in the hall as I came downstairs from the second floor just before luneh. I stopped on the first-floor landing and listened to the voice below. I had not a shadow of doubt as to the owner of that hateful voice, even before I looked over the balustrade and saw the odious wretch standing in the bright light from the south window, talking to the butler. It was the man who tormented me with his insolent invitation to supper at the Oxford, the man whom his companions called Duverdier. He was there in the morning sunshine—a creature who should only have been visible at night and in the shabbiest places. He was there in our pretty hall, against a background of pale soft colour, with the beautiful marble face of Mnemosyne looking over his shoulder, her finger-tip on her low broad brow, and her head bent as if in thought. There are several statues in the hall and the corridor, but Mnemosyne is my favourite among them all.

"Has Mr. Arden had my letters?" he asked, in his foreign English.

"Yes, sir, they have been given to him."

"Three letters?"

"Yes, sir."

"Two yesterday, and one this morning?"

"Yes, sir. They were all given to him."

"And there is no answer? Was that Mr. Arden's message?"

"Yes, sir. My master told me to tell you there was no answer."

"And he declines to see me?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very good."

He said "very good" with a face like a thunder-cloud. He lingered a little, brushing his hat with his coat cuff, in an agitated manner, and looking about him angrily, first at one door and then at another, as if he hoped to see Uncle Ambrose appear at one of them. At last he turned on his heel abruptly and went out without another word. I suppose he is one of that great army of begging-letter writers who assail both mother and Uncle Ambrose. I sometimes pity them, poor creatures, when I see the long, long letters, many of them so well written, consigned to the waste-paper basket, and perhaps some of those piteous letters may have a good deal of truth in them. It must seem to the shabby-genteel poor that people who live in such a house as this, and drive out in a fine carriage with splendid horses, and have an army of servants, and all that modern civilization can give of pleasure and prettiness—it must seem as if they ought never to say no to the appeal of real want. And yet if the rich people always said yes the fine house and the horses must go. I wonder if it is wicked to keep so much for ourselves, and give so little in proportion to what we keep.

"The half of my goods have I given to the poor," said the Pharisee. Well, it is wrong to be boastful, no doubt, but upon my word that Pharisee had some justification for thinking well of himself.

I don't think mother and Uncle Ambrose give half their substance in charity, kind and generous as they both are.

"Did that foreign person tell you his name?" I asked the butler, as I went into the dining-room.

"No, ma'am."

"And had he been here before to-day?"

"Yes, ma'am. He called yesterday evening to inquire if there was any answer to his letters. He sent two letters by a commissionnaire—one in the morning, and another in the afternoon."

What an importunate wretch the man must be! My blood runs cold at the thought that he may mean to tell my step-father about having seen me walking alone in Church Street late at night. He might make up any story, and I should have no witness against him; for I do not know the name of my good middle-aged friend in the cab. If he dare to slander me I must tell Uncle Ambrose the whole truth and brave it out. He will be shocked, no doubt,

at the idea of my prowling about London secretly after dark; but he cannot refuse to forgive me when I tell him of the insurmountable impulse which took me to that fatal house.

Cyril and I went to Hurlingham this afternoon with mother, and saw a polo match, and then strolled about the lawn and looked at the river together, while mother sat on the terrace in front of the house talking to her friends. It seems to me sometimes as if all the women in London must be her friends, she is so beset wherever we go. The public life, the constant movement, and perpetually changing faces do not suit me half so well as River Lawn and its placid insipidity. My books, my piano, an occasional single at tennis with Beatrice Reardon, my boat, my garden. Yes, I love Berkshire, and I believe I hate London.

The day was lovely; Hurlingham was lovely; Cyril was full of the kindest attentions; and yet I was not happy. Apart from my uncomfortable apprehensions about the man called Duverdier, I felt as if something had gone wrong in my life. An afternoon that would have been perfect bliss a few weeks ago—before we went to Paris, for instance—seemed flat, stale, and unprofitable. I looked at the river listlessly; I was not interested even in the gowns, some of which were extravagant enough to awaken the dead.

"Does this remind you of the Adriatic?" Cyril asked me, as we stood side by side upon the lawn that slopes to the river.

"Not the least little bit in the world. How can you compare this dirty London river with that delicious blue sea? You must be dreaming."

"I am dreaming," he answered. "I am dreaming of the hour when you and I stood side by side with our feet in the long grass that grows close to the sea on Torcello."

I felt in just the wrong mood for sentiment. Every word he said jarred upon my nerves.

"That's a very pretty speech, but I know you wish yourself among those horrid pigeon-shooters," I said flippantly; and, fond as I am of pigeons, I felt that I would willingly sacrifice a few just to get rid of my companion.

He looked offended; and then my conscience reproached me, and I said something civil; and then we walked up and down the lawn, and he talked as I suppose lovers do talk all the world over. It is not worth putting down in this midnight confidante of mine, though sometimes I scribble whole conversations, just for the love of scribbling.

Do all engaged girls get tired of their fiancés, I wonder? Is there always this feeling of weariness, this sense of the emptiness of life? Are all engagements as monotonous as mine? Cyril and I have been engaged less than four months, and yet I feel as if it were half a lifetime. I feel as if it were absurd in him to be sentimental, or to say pretty things, after such ages of courtship.

Oh, I wish, I wish, I wish I loved him better; if it were only out of gratitude to Uncle Ambrose, who is so pleased at the idea of our union, and who has told me again and again how happy it makes him to know that Cyril's happiness is secured.

Could I disappoint him? Could I be inconstant or capricious? Could I write myself down that worthless creature, a jilt, after all the father's goodness to me and all the son's affection? No, my fate is sealed. If the vows had been vowed at the altar I could hardly be more bound than I am. Bound in honour! What bondage can be stronger?

Uncle Ambrose is so good to me; but I have reproached him lately with neglecting my education, which seems a hard thing now when I am getting older, and, as I venture to think, worthier to be his pupil. I remember the pains he used to take with me, and the time he used to waste upon my exercises and compositions and résumés before I was in my teens; and now when I want his help he is generally too much occupied to give it; or if he consents to spend an hour in my morning-room hearing me read Dante or Virgil, I can see that his mind is no longer in the work. He used to give me such delightful explanations and illustrations over every page; so that to read a page of the Æneid or the Divine Comedy with him was as good as a lecture upon classic or mediæval history. He used to throw himself into the work with all his heart, talking of that old Florentine world as if he had lived in it and been intimate with all the people; flinging himself into vexed questions of politics or social life as if the argument were a thing of to-day; as if Dante had but just left the city; as if Savonarola were still teaching and preaching. And then he used to take such interest in any little composition of mine, and would laugh so pleasantly at my ungrammatical construction, my bread-and-butter missishness. Now, when his life ought to be utterly happy, having won the wife of his heart, there is a cloud upon his spirits. He seems to have lost all zest for the books he once loved.

Can it be that in his heart of hearts he knows my mother does not really love him—that she gave herself to him in the hope of

making his life happy, of giving him some reward for years of quiet devotion on his part? Can it be that he knows, as well as I know, that her heart is buried in her first husband's grave?

This is the only solution I can imagine for that shadow of trouble which hangs over his life, which makes all common pleasures a weariness to him, which makes him tire of everything, and turn restlessly from one frivolous amusement to another, as if in search of forgetfulness rather than of happiness.

I asked him the other day why he had been so eager to set up an establishment in London, and to plunge into the gay world.

"I had two motives, Daisy," he said with his grave, explanatory air, just like the Uncle Ambrose of my childhood. "The first was you! I thought it only right that in your dawn of womanhood you should taste all the pleasures which are supposed to be delightful to your age and sex. I did not want you to look back, in the time to come, and say to yourself, 'My step-father cheated me out of the privileges of my position in life—he kept me mewed up in a country-house when I ought to have been enjoying all the pleasures that society can offer to a rich man's daughter and heiress. Had he been my own father he would have been more considerate.' I did not want you to say that, Daisy, perhaps when I was dust."

"Do you think I could ever have been so unjust or so ungrateful?"

"It would have been only human to have regretted pleasures you had never known," he answered. "My secondary motive was purely selfish; I never lived till I made your mother my wife. I wanted to drink deep of the cup of life. I wanted all the pleasures and gladness that life could give me, even its most frivolous pleasures. I wanted to see what the great world was like, to hear my wife admired as a queen among women. I wanted to share the amusements which might interest her, to feel that our wedded life was one joyous holiday."

He broke off with a sigh. The word "joy" sounded pure mockery from those pale lips.

"Uncle Ambrose, I like you ever so much better as a scholar and a recluse than as a man of fashion," I cried, in my impetuous way.

Of course it was just one of those things I ought not to have said, and I began to apologize.

"I know how everybody admires you, and how anxious people are to see you," I said. "I hear them talking about you at parties,

asking if you are really the Ambrose Arden who wrote 'Flesh or Spirit,' and I hear them praising your noble head, and your placid expression, and quiet, contemplative manner. You are distinguished from the herd in whatever society you may appear—but still, but still I like my Uncle Ambrose of the Berkshire lanes better than the gentleman with whom mother and I tread the mill-round of London parties."

"You are right, Daisy; fashionable society is not my métier. But I wanted to see what the gay world was like, and whether there was anything in the atmosphere of London drawing-rooms that could make a man forget that bundle of doubts, regrets, and disappointments which we call self. I find no Lethe in Mayfair or Belgravia, Daisy. Self goes about with me from square to street, and from street to square."

He rose with a troubled sigh, and began to pace the room.

"You to talk of disappointments!" I cried reproachfully. "What a bad compliment to mother!"

"Daisy, you know as well as I do that to me your mother is simply the most adorable of women; and yet I am disappointed, and yet I am disheartened; for I thought this butterfly life of ours would please her, and I don't believe it does."

"You should have left her in the home she loves," I answered. "She was as happy there as she ever could be anywhere, after the sorrow that clouded her life for ever. You cannot expect such a cloud as that to pass away altogether. You cannot expect her ever to be just the same as other women in whose lives there has been no tragedy. You ought never to have brought her to live in London. Don't you know that to her and to me this great gay London, with all its wealth, and brightness, and headlong hunt after pleasure, means only the city in which my father was murdered? We can never forget that one fact. To us London must always be the most hateful place in the world."

I was carried away by my feelings, and said a good deal more than I meant to say.

"Does *she* feel that?" he asked, stopping in his pacing up and down, and looking at me fixedly.

"I think she must," I answered. "I know I do."

"We will go away in a week or two," he said hurriedly. "I will take you all to the Lakes. It is just the season to enjoy those shadowy hills and cool waters."

"We don't want the Lakes. We want home, and our own

gardens, and our own river," I said, angry at his caring for new places. "That is the only change mother and I care about."

He sighed and was silent, and after a little more pacing to and fro he resumed his seat at my side, and took up Dante at the line where we had strayed away into conversation.

This talk occurred the day before my pilgrimage to Denmark Street.

That odious man has forced himself into my step-father's presence, after ever so many repulses, and I am utterly mystified by his audacity and by my step-father's reticence.

Cyril and I were at the Opera last night with mother. Mother had promised to show herself, if it were for only half an hour, at a reception at the Foreign Office, where she is likely to meet all the people she knows and does not care a straw about. So we dropped her in Whitehall, looking superb in pale gray brocade, lighted up with sapphires and diamonds, and with her beautiful throat rising up out of a ruff of ostrich feathers; and then the carriage took us home, with instructions to go back for mother in half an hour. Uncle Ambrose had been complaining of headache all day, and was not well enough to go to either Opera or party.

The door was opened, and I was just going in when a man seemed to spring out of the darkness, pushed himself in front of Cyril, who was following me, and almost leapt into the house at my side. There were two men in the hall; but footmen are stupid, solemn creatures, trained to move slowly and to hold their chins in the air, and neither of those two powdered dolts had the sense to stop him. He walked straight to Uncle Ambrose's study, at the back of the hall, opened the door, and went in. I waited breathlessly, expecting to see him flung out into the hall again in the next moment; but he shut the door behind him, and the door remained shut. Uncle Ambrose was evidently giving him an interview.

Cyril was furious.

"Do you know that fellow?" he asked the footmen.

"He have been here before, sir, arstin' for answers to his letters, three or four, or I should say as much as five or six times within the week," one of the men stated solemnly, as if he had been in a witness-box.

"Do you know his name, or who and what he is?"

"I do not, sir, leastways only that he's a foreigner."

Cyril walked over to the door of the study, opened it, and went in. I waited, with my heart beating violently, expecting to be called in and questioned about my adventure in Church Street. Cyril came back to the hall in a minute or two.

"My father seems to know the fellow, and wishes to hear his grievance, whatever it is," he told me, with a vexed air. "I don't like the look of the man, and I told my father how he had pushed past me and rushed into the house. However, my father chooses to hear his story, and I can say nothing. Come up to the divan, Daisy; I don't want to be out of the way while that fellow is on the premises."

The divan is a little room on the half flight, fitted up in Mauresque style, and only divided from the landing by a partition, partly stained glass and partly carved sandal-wood from Persia. It is a capital nook for gossip or flirtation, and when we have a party the divan is always in great request. It is lighted by an Oriental lamp, which is in perfect harmony with the decoration, but which gives a very indifferent light.

Cyril ordered strawberries and lemonade to be sent up to this retreat, and we sat there for half an hour, pretending to talk about the opera, but both of us obviously preoccupied and uncomfortable, and both of us listening for the opening of the study-door below. I know we talked in hushed voices, and never withdrew our attention from what was going on downstairs. We could see the hall door through the open door of the divan, at the end of the vista beyond the shallow flight of stairs.

"I hate mysteries," Cyril said at last, in the midst of a languid debate about the merits and demerits of the new tenor.

I got up, and Cyril and I went on to the landing, and stood there looking over the balustrade into the hall until the door opened, and his father's voice called to the footman, "See that man out;" whereupon the man opened the great hall door, and the midnight visitor went out just a minute or so before the carriage stopped, and mother alighted.

She came into the hall in her long white cloak with its downy ostrich trimming, such a lovely, gracious figure, the gems in her rich brown hair flashing in the lamplight. Uncle Ambrose came out of his den to receive her.

"Were you amused, dearest?" he asked. "Was it a pleasant party?"

"It was a brilliant one, at any rate," she answered. "I met all

the people we know, and a few stars and foreign orders that I don't know. How white you look, Ambrose! You ought not be up so late. What was the use of staying away from the Opera and the reception only to tire yourself at home?"

"I have not been tiring myself, except with a dull book by a clever man. What pains some clever men take to be dull, by the way! I have been resting as much as I can rest, dear. I am past that golden age when sleep comes at will."

"But you had a late visitor. Who was the man who went out of the house just before I arrived?"

"An old acquaintance—that is to say, a bookbinder who worked for me years ago, who has the common complaint of old acquaintances—impecuniousness."

"And you helped him, of course?"

"I heard his story, and have promised to consider it."

"But if he is in immediate want——"

"My dearest, I have no opinion of the man's character, and I am doubtful whether I ought to believe his story. He forced an entrance into this house in an unwarrantable manner, and it would have served him right had I sent for a policeman and given him in charge. However, he pleads sore distress as an excuse for his audacity, and I let him tell me his story. I shall do nothing for him unless I get some confirmation of his statement from a respectable quarter."

Cyril and I were leaning over the balustrade, straining our ears to listen.

A bookbinder; that impertinent wretch is a bookbinder. And what a tissue of falsehoods his story of distress must be, when I saw him reeling out of a restaurant with his boon companions less than a week ago.

I suppose the wretch has said nothing about his meeting with me. He may not have associated the name of Hatrell with his old employer, Mr. Arden; and yet a man of that kind, hanging about the house as he has done, would be likely to find out all about us. He passed close to me as he pushed his way into the hall; but it is just possible he did not recognize me in my very different style of dress.

There was nothing in my step-father's manner to indicate agitation or irritation of any kind. I never heard his melodious voice calmer, or his accents more measured, than when he explained the midnight visit to my mother in the hall.

"The mountain has brought forth a mouse," said Cyril, gaily.

Mother came upstairs in the next minute, so I wished Cyril good night and went up to her dressing-room with her to hear all about the party, while her maid took off her jewels and finery.

July 15th.—We are at home once more in the dear old rooms and in the lovely old garden, and I feel almost as if my sixteenth birthday were still a grand event in the future—feel almost as young as I felt in the old childish days before mother's marriage, and our Italian travels, and our London gaieties, and all the experiences that have made me a woman of the world. I feel almost as I felt at sixteen, almost, but not quite, as happy as I felt then. There is no use in keeping a Diary unless one is sternly truthful, and stern truth compels me to acknowledge to this book that I am not so happy as I was before mother's marriage and my own engagement to Cyril.

In those old days I was as free as air—free to think and to dream, and to shape the many-coloured visions of my future life out of those idle dreams. Now my future is all mapped out for me, and my life has a master who will dictate all things. He is good, he is devoted, he is all that a fiancé should be, but still he is my master. There can be no doubt of that. My duty as his plighted wife involves confidence and obedience. I am bound to confide in him; I am bound to obey him.

Oh, I wish, I wish I loved him better. I wish I could feel as mother did when she was nineteen years of age, and engaged to my father. She has talked to me often of her thoughts and feelings at that time—how it seemed to her as if all this life of ours, and all this world we live in, began and ended in Robert Hatrell.

I have never felt like that, never, never, never.

What a perverse wretch I must be! How persistently all my thoughts and fancies drift into the wrong channel! Only this morning, walking alone on the terrace, where I made tea for Mr. Florestan, the fancy flashed into my mind that on that particular afternoon I was happier than I had ever been in my life.

What an idle notion, as idle and capricious as any of the fancies of my childhood when I used to give myself up to day-dreams, and lie upon the freshly cut grass in haymaking time and think of all the people I loved most in history, and dream that I was walking in the woods beyond Lamford with Charles the First and Henrietta Maria, and that I was destined somehow to come between the King and his enemies, yes, to save him from the scaffold, to help him in

his escape, like Flora Macdonald with the young Pretender. Charles Edward was not romantic enough for me. Alas! I knew that he grew fat and took to drinking in his old age. History is so brutal. Charles the First was my hero. I forgot all his shiftiness and double-dealing, his selfish sense of his own importance, his cowardly abandonment of Strafford. I forgot everything except that his head was very beautiful, as Vandyke painted it, and that Bradshaw and his crew cut it off.

Foolish, foolish Alice-in-Wonderland fancies. Every girl of eleven or twelve has her Wonderland, and if she has been crammed with history it is not of birds and beasts that she dreams, but of Joan of Arc, and her martyrdom at Rouen; or of Henry, the first Bourbon King, murdered in the quaint old streets of mediæval Paris; or of Mary of Scotland; or Marie Antoinette, and the young Dauphin, who suffered the most cruel reverse of fortune that ever Prince endured, and who died mysteriously, done to death in the wicked old prison.

My earliest dreams were of heroes and martyrs, my chosen favourites in the world of the dim romantic past. Then came more egotistical day-dreams, visions of the life that I was to lead and the wonderful things I was to do when I grew up. When I grew up—oh, phrase of marvellous meaning! Wealth, wisdom, power unlimited were to come to me as a matter of course—when I had grown up. I was to be very beautiful. Lovelier than any one else. There would be no good in a commonplace, everyday beauty. I must be beautiful excccdingly, an advantage which would not be without its drawbacks, as I should have on an average to reject a suitor a day. Beauty has its duties as well as its rights—the duty of crushing presumptuous pretenders to its favour.

Vainest, idlest visions! I am blushing, dear Diary, at the mere recollection of my absurdity; but I am happy to say this kind of day-dream only lasted as long as the novelty of being in my teens, and the first keen delight of wearing a gold watch which mother gave me on my thirteenth birthday.

Later visions were of philanthropic revolutions. I was to be the guardian angel of a great district in the poorest part of London. I saw myself walking in streets and alleys where the police hardly dared to enter. I saw myself visiting the hospitals, carrying good tidings to the dying. My heart swelled at the thought of the good I would do when I grew up, if mother would only let me do just as I liked, and spend my money how I liked.

Some foolish, chattering maidservant had told me that I should be rich, that I should have my own independent fortune when I grew up.

There were other castles-in-the-air that indicate a substratum of inordinate vanity under all my girlish shyness.

I could not take up an art without dreaming that I was going to excel in it. If I got on fairly well with my practice of Mozart's sonatas, I fancied that I was going to work on until I became a second Schumann or Essipoff. If I just managed to paint a little water-coloured sketch of the river or the village—the gable end of a cottage and a bit of garden—a backwater under the willows—I saw before my eager footsteps a long, bright road leading to a dazzling temple, where Fame sat ready with garlands and trumpets and gold medals, ready to pronounce me second only to Millais for figure and landscape.

Idle, idle dreams. They have all fled long ago—fled into the limbo of childish things—gone to the great rubbish heap where some of my dearest dolls are rotting. I hope and believe that I am cured of silly vanities, and that I am a fairly sensible young woman, quite aware of the difference of my dream nose—a perfect Grecian, and my real nose—a very tolerable retroussé; quite aware that a complexion powdered with freckles every summer can hardly be called alabaster—my dream-self had a distinctly alabaster complexion. In a word, I am aware of all my shortcomings, mental and physical, and am reconciled to them. All I ask in life is to live always with, or very near, mother, to be happy, and the cause of happiness in others.

Is that too much to ask, I wonder, in a world so full of suffering? I fear it is. If one had newly alighted upon this earth in some tropical valley, or by some Italian lake, one would suppose it a world made only for bliss. Who would suspect earthquakes, or disastrous tempests, floods, disease and famine, poisonous serpents and savage tigers, upon so fair a planet? Who would ever guess, new to the scene, that the majority of mankind are full of trouble, as the sparks fly upward?

No, there was never a more idle thought than that of mine which dwelt so obstinately upon the one half-hour I spent with Mr. Florestan, tête-à-tête upon the terrace. I don't believe it was more than twenty minutes. I know I made myself excessively disagreeable in order that he should not stay too long. I was seized with an attack of prudishness, I'm afraid; for after all it could not have

been very bad manners to give a visitor a cup of tea in my mother's absence.

Fountain Head is empty now. I hear the plashing of the fountain when I walk in the shrubbery that joins his shrubbery. The trees were planted the autumn after my father's death, when mother was just well enough to be wheeled about in her bath-chair to watch the planting. I can see her face now as it looked then, pale as marble, and without a smile. The trees have grown ever so big —chestnuts red and white, acacias, mountain ash and copper beech, conifers of every kind, tremulous birches, silvery white in sunshine or moonlight. It is a delightful shrubbery, arranged in careless-seeming curves, and with labyrinthine paths, and here and there a rustic bench, and in one deep wooded nook a rustic summer-house.

At a season like this, when the glare on the terrace is almost too much to be endured, even by a sun-worshipper like me, I bring my books and my work to this summer-house—I am writing in it now —and the dogs find me, and we make ourselves at home here, aloof from all the world.

There is no sound but the plash of Mr. Florestan's fountain, and the song of the thrushes which revel in this shrubbery. The nightingales are gone already. How soon the glory of summer dwindles away!

It must be horribly warm in Paris at this season, and I read in the papers that the city is given over to summer tourists. Yet I suppose Mr. Florestan prefers Paris to Berkshire.

In all probability he has gone off with the rest of the great world, and is taking the waters at Vichy or Royat, or away in that wonderful mountain region in the Pyrenees, where healing and beauty go hand-in-hand.

Wherever he may be I am glad we are here. Uncle Ambrose pleaded hard for the English Lakes. He had all but taken a house at Grasmere; but mother and I both wanted to come home, and we are at home, and we ought to be happy.

I wish Uncle Ambrose were happier; it grieves me to see that the desire of his heart has not brought him happiness. Mother is so attentive to him, so full of tenderness and forethought—but I know, I know it is not love that she gives him, and his heart hungers for love. I pity them both. Yes, it is just that—the one thing wanting. It is the little rift within the lute.

Oh, Diary of mine, it is an evil thing to marry without love.

The more I think of mother and her second husband, and the more I think of Cyril and myself, the more I feel that it is an evil thing. It is unmitigated evil to marry a man to whom one cannot give one's whole heart.

I pray God every morning and every night that I may grow fonder of Cyril—that I may learn to adore him, between now and our wedding-day. An engaged girl once told me that she did not care a straw for her fiancé when she accepted him. She only thought that it would be nice to be married and have a house of her own, and she had visions of her trousseau, and her mother had promised to give her half her diamonds when she married—all sorts of selfish considerations—but by the time she had been engaged three months she felt that she could beg her bread barefoot through the world with the man who was to be her husband. That was her way of putting it.

Cyril is clever, generous-minded, good-looking. He is a fine tennis-player; he sculls splendidly. A girl ought to find it easy to adore him. What can I want in a lover if I am not satisfied with him? Do I expect to marry a demi-god?

CHAPTER XIX.

DAISY'S DIARY.

WHEN I was a child, and even last summer, I used to think a July day could not be too long, provided, of course, that July behaved as July, and one could bask in the sunshine on the lawn or on the river, and cool one's self in the shade of willows in mysterious backwaters, where the sedges are full of bloom and the lilies lie in a tangle of loveliness, lifting their milk-white cups to the warm blue sky. This year I find I am growing old, and that we can have too much even of July, a monotony of loveliness that preys upon one's spirits, a perpetual sunshine that irritates one's nerves.

I have only lately discovered what it is to have nerves; and since I made that discovery I seem to have nothing but nerves. Mother asked me yesterday what had become of my sweet temper. She hardly recognized her daughter of a year ago in the fretful young person of to-day. Was I ever sweet-tempered? I asked myself wonderingly. I know I am very unamiable now. I was snappish to my dear old Broomfield this very morning I snatched

my white frock out of her hand while she stood shilly-shallying and prosing about it in her dear old rambling way, debating whether it was or was not fresh enough for me to wear.

"What does it matter?" I cried impatiently. "There is nobody to see my frock."

"Nobody, Miss Daisy, when Mr. Cyril is marching up and down by the boathouse at this very moment waiting for you?"

"Cyril is nobody; a fiancé doesn't count," said I.

"Don't he, miss? It was different in my time. A young woman always took pains with herself when she had some one to walk out with."

"And you used to walk out with all sorts of people, I believe, you dear old flirt," said I, for one of my earliest memories is of Broomfield's long stories about soldiers and shop-boys who paraded the London parks with her in her previous services.

"I always had admirers, Miss Daisy, but I knew how to keep them at arm's length," she answered with dignity. "A young person in service in London must have a well-behaved young man to walk out with, or she would never get a breath of fresh air."

"Oh, you cruel Broomfield, to think of the shoe-leather your victims must have worn out, you meaning nothing all the time."

"Lor, miss, they're used to it, and it only serves them right," said Broomfield. "They're all as artful as they're high, and they've always an eye to a young woman's Post Office Savings Bank book."

I encouraged the dear old thing to prattle in this fashion while she fastened my white cambric frock, and I forgot poor Cyril, who had been loafing about for the last hour waiting for me. I am afraid I am getting tired of the Thames. I am afraid I am developing an inconsistent, capricious character. How odd it is that one may go on adoring a place for years, and then weary of it suddenly, in one week of blazing July sunshine!

I hope it is only a temporary weariness, caused by the hot weather.

Fountain Head shows its usual dismal aspect of closed shutters and blinds drawn down. Mr. Florestan came in a meteor-like manner at the beginning of last week; took tea with mother on Tuesday afternoon while I was miles and miles up the river with Cyril, yawning myself to death over a silly novel, while he threw his fly for trout, and seemed to do nothing but entangle his line in the willows. When I went down to dinner that evening mother

informed me that Mr. Florestan had done me the honour to inquire about my health—as if I were ever ill!—and, furthermore, that he was to leave Fountain Head early next morning on his way to Scotland, where he was to spend the whole of August and September.

I felt inclined to hate Scotland.

"How will Paris get on without him? I'm afraid there'll be a revolution, or at least an émeute," I remarked flippantly.

I have noticed in myself lately that when I feel as if my heart were made of lead I am always inclined to be flippant.

Why should my heart be heavy? Why, oh, why? Cyril is so frank, so clever in his own bright, boyish way, so altogether what a young man ought to be: and yet I am not satisfied. There is a terrible sense of failure and a life gone wrong always gnawing at my heart. Mother began to talk to me yesterday about my trousseau, but I begged her not to mention the odious thing for ages. My drawers and *armoires* and hanging-closets are stuffed with clothes of all kinds, and how can I want more? True, that I never seem to have the right kind of gown to wear upon any given occasion; but I believe that is a peculiarity of all wardrobes, and I dare say if I had the most magnificent trousseau I should find before my honeymoon was over that I must refuse really tempting invitations for want of appropriate raiment.

All this is idle beating about the bush of my discontent. I am engaged to be married, and I shrink with actual aversion from the mere thought of the future life I have pledged myself to lead. I like my lover with a very cordial liking, and I am happy and at ease in his company, so long as he does not remind me that he *is* my lover, and that he expects very soon to be my husband. When he does remind me of that odious fact I almost hate him; just as I hate the July weather, and the river, and the gardens, and myself most of all.

Oh, it is such a dreadful thing to know one's self beloved by a good and true heart like Cyril's and not to be able to give one's whole heart in return. If it were not for this stupid old Diary I believe I should go out of my mind. It eases my heart a little to scribble about my thoughts and feelings. I could not talk even to my dear mother as I can talk to this book.

I wonder Mr. Florestan did not stay one day longer at Fountain Head, just to see us all again, and to tell us the latest news of Paris.

Poor mother has anxieties of her own, and it would be cruel to

plague her with mine, even if I could bring myself to confess all my troubled thoughts to her, which I am sure I could not. She is anxious about Uncle Ambrose, and I don't wonder. He is in very bad health, and I fear that his mental health is in question, and that seems more hopeless and more full of alarm for the future than any bodily ailment.

He came back to River Lawn reluctantly; and I have seen him change for the worse day by day since we came here. He spends all his studious hours in the old cottage, sitting in the library where he has all his choicest books, and where he did so much good work in past years. But even in his studious hours he is restless, and comes back to this house every now and then in a capricious, purposeless way, just to say a few words to mother, or to wander about the garden for a few minutes, and to stand looking dreamily at the river, as if he had had some motive for leaving his books and coming across the road, and had forgotten it on the way.

He will not admit that he is ill, nor will he consent to consult a physician, though mother has urged him to see any one of the great men in whom everybody believes. He declares that he has never in his life consulted a doctor on his own account, and that he is too old to begin.

"I remember a sleek, white-haired gentleman with gold-rimmed spectacles, who felt my pulse and looked at my tongue every day for a fortnight, when I had the measles," he said, "and who dosed me with nauseous medicine three times a day, and with nightly powders. He gave me a poor opinion of the faculty which I have never been able to outlive."

It is all very well for him to make light of his ailments, and to refuse all advice, but I know he is ill, and very ill. He has a nervous irritability at times which makes him altogether unlike the Uncle Ambrose of old; and something happened the other day which makes me fear that his nerves are in a worse condition than even mother suspects, anxious though she is about him.

I was dawdling in the hall, after playing tennis all the morning with Cyril, who really is quite the finest player I know. I was examining my racket before I put it in the stand, and was almost hidden by one of the oak pillars, which stood between me and the library door.

The garden door opened while I was standing there and Uncle Ambrose came into the hall, looking white and weary, as he so often looks now. He opened the door of my father's old study,

expecting to find my mother there. "Clara," he said, as he opened the door.

She was not there, and the room was empty. He stood upon the threshold motionless for some moments—the time seemed longer to me as I watched him standing there, rigid as a stone figure, staring into the empty room; then he gave a groan of agony, staggered back into the hall, and sank into a chair, and sat there languid almost to fainting, wiping the perspiration from his forehead. I could see his hand tremble as he drew his handkerchief out of his coat pocket.

I came from behind the pillar and ran to him. He gave a cry at sight of me just as if I had been a ghost. I offered to get him some brandy, but he said there was no occasion. There was nothing the matter with him except a passing faintness, which had come over him as he opened the library door.

"Don't tell your mother," he said; "it would only alarm her causelessly."

"But she ought to know," I told him. "Indeed, indeed, indeed, Uncle Ambrose, you must consult some clever physician—you must not go on any longer like this."

"Well, child, I will consult a physician, if my submission upon that point will make you and your mother any happier; although I can tell you beforehand that no doctor in London—not the whole College of Physicians—can do any good for me. The evil I suffer from is purely nervous, and no doctor has yet fathomed the mystery of the nerves, any more than any theologian has fathomed the mystery of the worlds that lie behind this life or in front of it."

I took his hand in mine and found it as cold as ice, and the perspiration kept starting out afresh upon his forehead. His whole being seemed convulsed and shattered. I had heard of catalepsy, and I could but think that he was in a cataleptic state during those minutes in which he stood on the threshold of the library.

"If you will promise to go up to London to-morrow with mother, to see a doctor, I will not tell her anything about this attack to-day," I said; "but if you refuse, I must tell her."

"Haven't I said that I will do anything to please you and your mother, Daisy?"

He kept his word, and mother and he went off to Cavendish Square, and my cousins from Harley Street came down for a long day at tennis. I can only say that it was a long day. The interval between lunch and tea was a Pacific Ocean of time. I thought the

blessed break of afternoon tea would never come; but the tea kettle appeared at last, and mother and her husband came home soon after.

She knew I was almost as anxious as herself, and she told me all the doctor had said. It did not seem to amount to much, but no doubt it was comforting. All the wisdom of Cavendish Square might be summed up under three heads: a judicious diet, as per half-page of note-paper filled with the great man's writing—less intellectual work—and bromide of potassium. The diet was the most important point, according to the physician, and I suppose he was right, and that an injudicious helping of Aylesbury duck may have been the cause of that strange seizure at the door of my father's old den.

Cyril took his father's illness rather lightly. I told him of the attack, though I said not one word about it to mother.

"My father is paying the penalty of having no fixed purpose or pursuit in life; he is suffering from too much money and too much metaphysics. He has a brain capable of better work than he has ever done, and he is beginning to suffer from wasted energies."

"But he has written books that have made their mark in the most intellectual circles," said I.

"Yes, and therefore books that the British public don't care twopence about—books that interrogate everything and solve nothing—books that leave us not one hair's-breadth farther advanced towards the comprehension of the three great mysteries of matter, life, and mind than Aristotle and Plato left us three hundred and fifty years before the birth of Christ."

"Some of the reviews said that your father's book marked a new era in philosophy," said I.

"My dear Daisy, Philosophy is like the sea. The waves rise and fall, and change their forms every hour; but the shore is always at exactly the same distance from mid-ocean."

I felt that it seemed hard upon Uncle Ambrose that the son should make so light of the labours of the father's life-time.

Oh, I am wicked, desperately wicked, steeped to the lips in falsehood and dishonour! He is too honourable a man to have insisted upon speaking, had I been firm. But the crisis of my life came upon me suddenly, and I behaved as impulsively and unwisely and abominably as the most uneducated school-girl could have behaved. I encouraged the avowal which I ought to have prevented. I

longed so to hear all he had to say. I wanted so much to know the secret of his heart, though that heart could never be mine.

Gilbert Florestan had not gone to Scotland, after all. When I awoke yesterday morning, I thought of him far away in Argyleshire. I pictured the barren heathery hills, purple and palest green under the baking July sky, as Flora and Dora—who go everywhere—have often described them to me; and I thought how much nicer those wild hills above the Kyles of Bute must be than our pretty little toy-shop river with its willowy eyots, which look as if one could hold them in the hollow of one's hand.

I felt such a longing for Scotland yesterday morning, almost as if I were homesick for a country I had never seen. I began to think I must have a Scottish ancestor hidden in some corner of the family tree. All our fancies and vagaries are put down to heredity nowadays, and certainly yesterday morning I felt Scotch blood seething and bubbling in my veins.

But he was not in Scotland. Mother had misunderstood him about the date of his journey, or else he had changed his mind. At any rate he had only gone to London to see about guns and fishing tackle for the autumn; and there he was yesterday morning at eleven o'clock coming suddenly between me and the light, as I sat reading alone in the summer-house in the shrubbery.

Cyril had left us by an early train for a two days' visit to a Manor House near Guildford, in religious observance of one of those college friendships which young men esteem so highly. His friend had telegraphed to him urgently, "Come," and he went; having carefully ascertained first that I did not mind. How I wish I had minded more!

I felt a sense of relief when I saw him drive away from the gate; and yet I was dull without him. I missed his cheerful society, which generally makes thought impossible; and I sat thinking deeply in the stillness of the shrubbery, where there were no birds singing any more, it seemed. I had books, work, a little sketch-block, and colour-box, ample means for employment or amusement; and yet I sat idly thinking, idly dreaming, and picturing a life that was not the life I had pledged myself to lead.

In the midst of these vain and foolish dreams, he whose image had mixed itself with all of them, stood suddenly before me. I looked up and saw him standing there, mute and serious. My guilty conscience sent the blood up to my face in a great wave of crimson. I could not speak, nor I think could he just at first.

"I thought you were in Scotland," I said at last, and I really felt as if I had achieved a brilliant remark.

He explained, and, the sound of our voices having made us both just a little more at our ease, he sat down in the only empty chair, and took up my books, one by one, and looked at their titles.

"How learned you are!" he said. "Cousin, Spinosa, Reid: I did not think that little girls troubled their curly heads about philosophy."

"I am not a little girl," I answered, huffed at this impertinence, "and philosophy is my Uncle Ambrose's favourite subject. He taught me all I know, and I like to read the subjects that interest him."

"Have you read much this morning?" he asked, looking me straight in the face, with a cruelly deliberate scrutiny.

Again the hot blood rushed up to cheeks and brow, and I felt that he must know by my wretched blushes that I had not read a word; that I had just given over my heart and my mind to foolish thoughts of him; profitless thoughts of what might have been if I had not engaged myself to Cyril that day at Torcello, and if he, Gilbert Florestan, had happened to care just a little for me. Could any day-dreams be wilder or more unbecoming a girl with the slightest notion of self-respect? I felt that I had degraded myself by my own folly, and that I was hardly worthy to live.

"Have you read much this morning?" he asked again, provokingly persistent.

"Not very much."

"If you were like me you would not have read half-a-dozen consecutive lines. I have not been able to read properly for many weeks. An image comes dancing along the printed lines and dazzles me; like that spectrum of the sun we see upon the page of a book after we have looked at the sun himself. I have been no good for intellectual work for ever so long, Miss Hatrell."

It was a relief when he called me Miss Hatrell, for I had been trembling lest he should call me Daisy. It was a relief to find him properly ceremonious; but I did not know how brief the respite was to be, and how soon he was going to shatter the citadel of my self-respect.

He looked at all the books again, rearranged them methodically on the table, took up my sketch-block, and looked critically at the half-finished sketch of a group of sycamores by the bend in the opposite shore. I don't suppose he recognized them, though he

must have known the originals from his boyhood. I took my little bit of embroidery out of my basket. It was one of my numerous beginnings in a new style of work, which don't often go beyond the preliminary stage. I threaded my needle carefully with silk of the wrong colour, and began a bit of a scroll. Every stitch had to come out when I took up my work again this morning. I seem to have been colour-blind yesterday.

"Miss Hatrell," he said at last, "when is this marriage to be?"

I concluded that he must mean my marriage, though he put his question rather vaguely.

"I don't know. There is no date fixed yet. Not for ages, perhaps."

"Ages in a young lady's vocabulary generally mean weeks. There is no date fixed? But the marriage is fixed, I suppose. There is no doubt as to that?"

"No," I answered resolutely. "There is no doubt; there never has been any doubt; there is no room for doubt."

"You have never felt the slightest inclination to withdraw your promise? Such things have been done, you know, and in all honour. Better to discover now than later that your heart is not wholly given to your fiancé: better for you, happier for him. It is not an honourable act to marry a man you do not love, only because you have promised rashly."

"I have promised, and I mean to keep my word," I answered, still resolute; and now the crimson flush, the fiery heat of that fierce shame had cooled, and I could feel from the faint sickness of my sinking heart that I must have turned deadly pale. "I have many reasons for being true to my promise which you cannot know, motives of gratitude, motives of affection. I am not romantically in love with my fiancé. I don't think there are many romantic marriages in our day. Girls have grown more sensible. They no longer take their ideas of life from Byron and Moore."

I knew that I was rattling on in a most ridiculous way; but I felt constrained to talk. It was my only means of hiding my confusion, a kind of cuttle-fish vivacity, by which I hoped to obscure my thoughts in a cloud of words.

Mr. Florestan leant his arms upon the table where my books and work were scattered, and watched my face earnestly while I spoke, as if he was reading the thoughts behind all my foolish babble.

"You are not romantically in love with your *futur*," he repeated

slowly, "but you have promised to be his wife, and you mean to keep your promise. You are perfectly contented with your lot. I think that is the gist of what you have just said to me, Miss Hatrell? That is what you *mean?*"

"Yes," I answered stiffly, "that is what I mean."

"Then I can only ask you to pardon my impertinent questioning, and wish you good-bye," he said, rising slowly, and taking his hat, which he had put upon the bench beside him. "I shall go to Scotland to-night."

He held out his hand and I gave him mine without a word. I wonder which was the colder. I thought of Mrs. Browning's simile of "a little stone in a running stream."

Ah! if my hand could have lain in the hollow of his *comfortably*, as his possession, with what wild happiness this heart would have beaten!

We parted so, with a most admirable gravity. Sir Charles Grandison and Miss Byron could not have behaved any better in a similar situation. And then, all at once, as I heard his footstep grinding the gravel, Satan got hold of me, and I ran after him. I did more than run; I flew. He was walking very fast, and I only caught him within a few paces of the gate which opens out of the shrubbery into the lane close to his own grounds.

"Mr. Florestan," I gasped, too breathless to say more.

He turned and faced me, still with that Grandisonian gravity.

"I hope you are not angry with me," I said inanely.

"Angry! What right have I to be angry?" returned he. "I ventured, perhaps over boldly, to ask a question. You have answered it frankly, and there's an end. Whatever hope led me to you this morning is a hope that has vanished. Nothing less than the knowledge that you are unhappy in your engagement to Mr. Arden would justify me in telling you what I might tell if honour would allow. Oh, Daisy, Daisy," he cried, clasping my hands, and changing in one instant from Sir Charles Grandison to the most animated and impassioned of men, "why do you tempt me to say what were better unsaid—if—if you have really made up your mind? Don't trifle with me; don't fool me. Oh, I think I understand you. I know what women are, even the best of them. You are going to marry Cyril Arden, but you would like, just for sport, to know how hard hit I am. Very hard hit, Daisy. The arrow has gone home to its mark, and it is a poisoned dart that will leave its venom in the wound for many and many a year. Is it not a pleasure, my

sweet one, to know that in making one man happy you will make another man miserable?"

"No, it is not a pleasure; and I am utterly wretched," I said; and as the tears were rolling down my cheeks he could not help believing me.

He took me in his arms, and held me to his heart, and kissed my forehead and my hair—kissed *me*, Cyril's promised wife—and I let him, out of sheer misery. I was too completely broken down with woe to make a good fight for honour.

"Dear love, break this foolish engagement; scatter your precipitate vows to the winds. It will be better for everybody—for Arden, whom you don't care about, for me who adore you, and even for your sweet, sweet self, whose heart beats throb for throb with mine—like the rival engines which will be racing to Scotland through the summer night, one of them carrying me away from you!"

I had recovered my senses by this time, and wrenched myself from his arms.

"How cruel of you to take such advantage of my helplessness!" I said, trying to smooth down the fluffy curls upon my poor ill-used forehead. "Sir Charles wouldn't have done such a thing."

"Sir Charles!" he echoed, doubtless thinking me mad.

"I am very sorry that I was so foolish as to follow you," I said. "There was really no reason for my doing such an absurd thing. Only I wished to part friends."

"That means you are obdurate to both your victims. You will marry Arden—not caring a straw for him—and you will break my heart, caring perhaps just a little more than a straw for me."

"You are very impertinent for making such a suggestion," I said, with all the hauteur I could summon to my voice and countenance, and it is very difficult for a girl of my disposition to summon any.

The fairy who ought to have supplied me with feminine dignity and proper self-respect must certainly have taken offence at my christening, for I feel myself lamentably deficient in those qualities, and I really think the want of them is worse than a spindle through one's hand. Worse than a spindle. Worse than an after-dinner nap of a century. What if I were to sleep for a hundred years and Gilbert Florestan were to wake me, "in that new world which is the old!"

Ah, why have we no fairies now? Why has life no sweet surprises? Why has everything in my life gone wrong?

He did not notice my reproach.

"Is there no hope, Daisy?" he asked, pronouncing my name as if he had never been accustomed to address me by any other.

"I have told you that I mean to be true to my promise," I said. "I am ashamed of myself for having given you the idea that I could possibly waver. Good-bye, once more, and a pleasant journey to Argyleshire."

I did not offer to shake hands with him again. It would have seemed absurd after his terrible conduct three minutes before. I turned and ran back to the arbour as fast as ever I could go, and I opened the driest and most pessimistic of the books upon my table, and read and read and read for an hour and a half, till mother came to look for me, and to tell me that the luncheon gong had sounded ever so long ago.

I shut my book with a bang, and went meekly back to the house with the dear mother, and I had not the least little bit of notion what I had been reading, except like Hamlet's book that it was "words, words, words." I hated myself as I had never hated myself before; though I have been ever keenly alive to my own hatefulness, to my hideous propensity for doing or saying the wrong things on every possible occasion. To-day self-scorn was sharp as an acute bodily pain, as a raging toothache, for instance, or a gnawing rheumatism. Why had I so betrayed myself? Why had I gone out of my way to let him see that I love him, and that my fidelity to Cyril is only maintained by a struggle? That while I was dismissing him and his love as a hopeless case, I was ready to throw myself into his arms and say, "Let us go to Scotland together; let us be married by the blacksmith at Gretna Green; if there is any such person as the blacksmith, or any such place as Gretna Green left for true lovers in this unromantic age."

I felt that he could never more have a good or proper opinion of me. I felt that if he had had a sister turn out like me he would have considered her a disgrace to the family. I was more completely miserable than I had ever been since those weary days at Westgate-on-Sea, when the misery of my father's death was a new thing, and when I was parted from my mother. A kind of helplessness and a dull aching sense of degradation had taken hold of me; and the worst of all was that for the first time in my life I dared not confide in my mother. We sat opposite each other at the luncheon-table, neither of us caring to eat; she low-spirited about my step-father, who was buried in his book-room over at the cottage; I dumb and despairing.

When the silence was at last broken, it was that dear mother of mine who broke it in just the way which of all others jarred upon my irritated nerves.

"Daisy," she said, "it is absolutely necessary to arrive at some definite idea about your marriage. Cyril has been pleading with me very earnestly, poor fellow. He is tired of his solitary existence in chambers; tired of bachelor amusements. He is devotedly attached to you, and he wants to begin his domestic life."

And then she went on in her sweet, tender way, which brought the tears into my eyes, to remind me that, though very young, I am no younger than she was when she cast in her lot with my father; and to tell me again, as she has so often told me, how completely happy her wedded life was. The more she said about that perfect union the more miserable I felt, until at last the tears rolled down my cheeks, and my handkerchief became a mere wet rag, and I felt that if I was like any bride at all it was the Mourning Bride in somebody's play, of whom all I know is that her existence gave occasion for a much-quoted line about music, and an over-praised descriptive passage about a temple.

"Do you think you could make up your mind to be married in the autumn, Daisy?" mother asked, at last.

I believe she took my tears to be only the expression of a general soft-heartedness—there are some girls whose eyes brim over at a tender word—and not as indicative of sorrow, for she asked the question quite cheerfully.

"Which autumn?" inquired I.

"This coming autumn, naturally."

"Why, mother, that would be directly."

"No, dearest, we are still in July. Suppose we were to fix upon October for the wedding. That would give us three months for your trousseau. All other things are ready: your charming rooms in Grosvenor Square, and at least half this house. Your stepfather and I will be over-housed even then; especially as Ambrose does not love this place, and would like to travel during some part of every year."

"Yes, there is room enough for us all," I said; "and as for the trousseau, I don't care a straw about it. You have dressed me so well all my life that I never hunger for new clothes. It is only the badly dressed girls who are eager for wedding finery."

"Leave the trousseau to me, then, Daisy," said mother, "and I will take care that it is worthy of the dearest girl in the world. I

may tell Cyril that he shall begin his new life before the end of October, may I not?"

"Tell him just what you like, mother," I answered, with a heart as heavy as lead. "You must be the best judge of what is right."

I left her a few minutes afterwards to go back to the garden. I felt a restlessness which made it impossible for me to stay in the house, a perpetual fever and worry which seemed a part of the heavy burden that weighed on my spirits. And, oh, I had been so happy, so happy in that very garden only a year ago.

I want to do what is right. If I made a mistake about my own feelings at Torcello, it is not right that another should suffer for my thoughtlessness and folly. I gave my promise far too lightly. It never occured to me how solemn a thing it is to pledge one's love for a lifetime. I was rather pleased to be engaged, to have Cyril for my own property; and whenever doubtings or questionings arose in my mind I told myself that as time went on, and we grew older, I should grow more and more attached to him, being really very fond of him, in a sisterly kind of way, to begin with. Only when we were leaving Paris did I discover how dreadfully I had misread my own heart; for then only did I know what love—such love as mother felt for her sweetheart—really means. It was just in one moment, in that parting at the station, that the dreadful truth flashed upon me. Oh, the heartache of parting, the look in his eyes which seemed to plead for pity, to urge me to be brave, and cast off the pretence of love, and own boldly to the reality! He was not openly dishonourable; he waited for me to break my bonds. He could not know how strongly I was bound in gratitude and family love, as well as in honour, to Cyril. Nobody except mother and I can ever know how much I owe to Uncle Ambrose. No, there is no possibility of revoking my promise, and Cyril is all that is good and true, and I dare say my life will be very happy with him. I have but to forget those two short weeks in Paris, and that one tête-à-tête cup of tea, and this morning in the arbour, and his face when he left me. Not much surely to forget, seeing how much women do forget nowadays; seeing how quickly mothers forget their lost children, and sons and daughters their parents, and the most sorrowful widows the husbands they once adored. Forgetfulness must be easier than it seems to one, while the pangs of memory are still acute.

I went back to the house, too restless to stay long anywhere, and on my way to the hall door I was startled by a most hateful

apparition in the person of that odious Frenchman who attacked me in Church Street, and who seems to have interwoven himself into our lives by his persistent appeals to my stepfather's charity. I know how kind Uncle Ambrose is; and yet I should have given him credit for more firmness of mind than to allow himself to be hunted down by a needy impostor of this kind. The man was coming from the gate towards the hall door when we met face to face, and he looked considerably abashed at encountering me.

"Ah, you may well feel ashamed of yourself," I said indignantly. "Yes, I am the lady you had the audacity to waylay in the street when you were tipsy."

"You are Miss Hatrell," he faltered, looking an absolute craven.

"Yes, I am Miss Hatrell. What do you want at my mother's house?"

"I want to see—my employer—your stepfather."

He said those two words, "My employer," in a most detestable manner, implying contempt for the man for whom he had worked, and by whom he had no doubt been liberally paid.

"Mr. Arden is over the way, at his cottage," I said. "You can go to him there, if you like. You will not be admitted into my mother's house."

He looked at me from head to foot with a very insolent expression, but as his eyes met mine his countenance changed suddenly, and there was more of fear than of insolence in his look. His olive complexion changed to a greyish pallor, and he turned on his heel abruptly, muttering something which I did not hear. He walked quickly back to the gate and went out, and the shrug of his shoulders as he swung the gate open might mean anything in the world.

My study window overlooks the lane, and I saw him nearly an hour afterwards leave the cottage. He looked both angry and crest-fallen; and I fancy Uncle Ambrose had not proved so amenable as the applicant had expected. I wonder whether he had mentioned our meeting in Church Street *this* time. I think not. The part he played in that encounter would scarcely recommend him to my stepfather's generosity.

CHAPTER XX.

SCATTERED TO THE WINDS.

I HAVE seen that man again. He was lounging on the grassy bank above the lock this evening in the sunset, as Cyril and I came through in our wherry. There the creature sprawled, looking hideously metropolitan in his black cutaway coat and black felt hat, against the background of flowering grasses and the ragged old hedge-row, tangled with woodbine and starred with blackberry blossom.

I pointed him out to Cyril.

"That is the bookbinder-man who haunts your father," I said; and then I told him how this detestable person had been at River Lawn inquiring for Uncle Ambrose.

"Did my father see him?" asked Cyril.

"Evidently; for he was nearly an hour at the cottage. I saw him leave."

"My father may have kept him waiting for the best part of that time," answered Cyril. "You know how absent-minded he is when he is among his books."

"Yes, indeed," said I, "and I hope that odious man was sitting on the little oak bench in the lobby nursing his hat all the time."

The last entry is two days old; and now I have to record the strangest event in my life, since I have come to womanhood—an event so startling that I am almost too agitated to write about it, although it happened yesterday. But the record must be written; for this book is to be all my life, a faithful history of the romance and reality of my existence, of hard facts and idle dreams, of every act of folly and every gleam of sense. In a word, this book is to be a photograph of me, a photograph in pen and ink, by an unskilled photographer.

I awoke yesterday morning with that curious feeling with which I have so often awakened of late—a feeling of vague wonder. As I float gradually from sleep to waking, I ask myself, "What is it?" I know there is something amiss in my life; but what, but what? And then I remember that I am engaged to be married, and that October is very near. And then I think how good it would be for everybody if I were to fall ill and die, and leave Cyril free to marry

somebody who would really love him, and be honestly glad to be his wife. There are such girls, no doubt. I believe I could name seven between Henley and Reading.

That was the feeling with which I awoke yesterday. A lovely day, and the church clock striking six with a clear and silvery sound that means a west wind, and my room filled with the sweetness of the white clematis, which grows over all this end of the house.

I was out in the garden by seven, and breakfasted with mother, Uncle Ambrose, and Cyril at eight. There is a tennis tournament on at the Rectory, and Cyril and Beatrice Reardon were to play the final yesterday, between eleven and one. I was expected to look on; but my early walk in the garden had given me a headache, or something else had; so I told Cyril I could not stand the noise and glare of the tennis-court at the Rectory, where all the Reardon family and hangers-on would be bawling and laughing, and making themselves generally detestable—to any one with a headache. So I said I would go for a gentle walk while he was finishing the match, and be home in time to congratulate him at luncheon.

"For you are sure to win," said I.

"I don't know about that. Beatrice is a very fine player."

"She ought to be," said I, "for she thinks of nothing else. To hear her talk, one would suppose the honour of England was to be maintained by tennis."

"Well, it is a fine, manly game, and suits the girls of this generation," he replied, and we walked together as far as the Rectory gate.

"Don't tire yourself, darling," he said, looking at me ever so kindly with his honest eyes, as we parted; and then I went for a long and lonely ramble in the Berkshire lanes.

Those Berkshire lanes have been my one sovereign cure for the headache ever since my head was old enough to ache. A quiet walk between those flowering hedgerows, those primrose and violet banks, those avenues of lords and ladies, and dog-roses and woodbines, has always soothed my aching head. If the sweet air and the scent of the flowers could only cure my aching heart as well! I thought yesterday. But heartache is not cured so easily.

I went for a long, long ramble, without thought of Cyril's warning, rather wishing to tire myself into a state of drowsy forgetfulness before I crept home. The church clock struck one as I came across the meadows, in sight of the village. The aftermath was deep and full of flowers, and the narrow footpath between the tall

grass and the hedgerow was the quietest haven in which to think of one's troubles. I felt sorry I was so near home when I came to the little gate that opened out of the meadow into a deep lane leading directly to our own road. River Lawn was in front, between me and the Thames, and Uncle Ambrose's cottage was on my left hand as I turned my face to the river.

I was lingering at the gate, in a dreamy mood, when I heard footsteps in the lane. I thought they might belong to one of those everlasting Reardons, and, as I wasn't equal to meeting a Reardon, I drew back behind a bushy blackthorn that grew beside the gate, and watched the passer-by.

There was more than one—two men went slowly by, in earnest, and, as I thought, in angry, conversation, though the tones of the one who was talking when they passed the gate were suppressed almost to a whisper.

These two were Uncle Ambrose and the French bookbinder. Scarcely had they passed the gate when another man followed, stealthily, evidently listening to their conversation.

The third man was Cyril—Cyril, my betrothed husband; Cyril, the pattern of honesty and honour, creeping at his father's heels, and acting the degrading part of listener.

I could hardly believe my eyes. I was shocked, horrified, disgusted; and yet, after thinking the whole thing over during a most painful reverie, I was obliged to confess to myself that if the opportunity had occurred to me I might have done the same thing.

The persistent intrusions of that Frenchman are not to be endured without protest of some kind; and I think Cyril was justified in listening to any conversation in which that man bore a part, in order to protect his good, easy, and most unworldly-wise father from being imposed upon.

Yes, after serious reflection, I found excuses for my poor Cyril, although the sight of that creeping figure, with head bent forward to listen, gave me a dreadful shock.

A greater shock was to come a few hours after, a shock which agitates my heart and nerves at this moment, not knowing how I ought to take it, whether I ought to be glad or sorry. Glad I cannot be, recalling my poor Cyril's white, agonized face as he talked to me by the river at five o'clock yesterday afternoon. Sorry I cannot be, when I remember how cruelly the tie with which I had bound myself weighed upon my spirits.

It was late when I went into the house, but no one had gone to lunch. Mother was sitting alone in the morning-room. Her work-basket was on one side of her chair, her book-table on the other, but she was neither reading nor working, and I thought she looked worried and anxious.

"Uncle Ambrose among his books as usual, I suppose," said I, feeling myself a dreadful hypocrite, though after all there had been time enough for him to get back to the library since he passed me in the lane.

"No doubt," answered mother. "He went across to the cottage soon after breakfast."

"Mother," said I, "if I were you I would take him away from Berkshire. Let us all go to Salzburg, or the Dolomites, or Auvergne, or somewhere, at least until October. This place doesn't suit Uncle Ambrose. He is not happy; and you are not happy. Our lives are beginning to be a failure. There is something wrong somewhere."

"Yes," answered my mother gravely, "there is something wrong. Your step-father is out of health. There is some depressing influence at work. I have done all I can—but I cannot make him happy."

Poor mother! There was such a settled sadness in her tone that the tears rushed to my eyes, and it was all I could do not to sob aloud.

I understood her secret thought so well. She had done all she could. She had sacrificed her freedom, her fidelity to her first love, the idolized husband of her youth, out of gratitude to this faithful friend. She had put every selfish thought and feeling aside in order to reward his devotion, and the sacrifice had been useless. He was not happy.

In one vivid glance I saw my own future fashioned after the semblance of my mother's life to-day. I saw myself the wife of a man whom I could not love, and I saw him unhappy in the discovery which no loyal effort of mine could keep from him.

Poor mother! poor daughter!

It was nearly three o'clock when mother and I went into the dining-room, and by that time I had contrived to cheer her with talk about the books we had been reading lately, and about a possible run to the Continent in the early part of September. We talked of Auvergne and of Cauterêts, both of which districts were still untrodden ground for us, and untrodden ground has always

the attraction of an earthly Paradise. There was no sign of Cyril.

"He must have lunched at the Rectory," said my mother. "Rather bad manners on his part. He ought to have come to lay his laurels at your feet."

His laurels? Ah, yes, the result of the final. The prize is a copy of the "Idylls of the King," bound in vellum; and if Cyril wins I am to have the book. Beatrice will be savage at losing it, though I don't believe she ever read twenty consecutive lines of poetry, unless it was "John Gilpin."

After our feeble attempt at luncheon, mother went off on one of her charitable expeditions. I knew that would last for a good two hours, so I resigned myself to take tea alone, unless Cyril should reappear. I was really anxious to see him, as I wanted to hear what he had overheard in the lane; and I fancied he would not keep his discovery from me, although he would expect to be reproved for his unworthy behaviour in playing the spy upon his father. Of course there could be nothing to the discredit of Uncle Ambrose in his discovery, only the revelation of that dear good man's weakness where anything in the way of a book is concerned. Such a devoted lover of books would allow himself to be imposed upon even by the man whose trade was to bind them. Indeed, it is extraordinary the importance which these book-lovers attach to the outer covering of a book. I have seen volumes in Uncle Ambrose's library with landscapes painted on the edges of the paper, under the gilding—a deccration which has cost two or three pounds per volume. Yet the book is put in a shelf where nobody sees the painted edges from year's end to year's end.

I ordered my tea upon the terrace—exactly where I had my tea-table that afternoon when Mr. Florestan and I took tea tête-à-tête. Somehow, haphazard, I think, I had taken Napier's "Wanderings on the Spey" from a shelf in the library, and the book seemed to carry me nearer to Scotland—and to him. "No doubt he is enjoying himself immensely in that sportsman's paradise," thought I, and I turned over the leaves to see if Napier said anything about grouse.

It was a delicious afternoon, with a hot sun and a blue sky—a sky flecked with faint, feathery cloudlets. It was the kind of afternoon which used to mean unqualified bliss; and even in spite of my troubles I could not help feeling a kind of sensuous content as I lolled back in my pet wicker chair and watched the ripple of the

river, and the gentle movement of the willows where the opposite bank curved inwards towards the broad reach over which the church tower casts its solemn shadow.

The second quarter after four chimed from the dear old tower, the tea-table stood ready, the little copper kettle hissed gaily, but still there was no sign of Cyril. I began to feel just a little uneasy about him, for it was unlike his usual way to be anywhere within reach and not come to hunt me out every hour or so, either for a ramble or a ride, a single, or a row on our beloved river.

It was nearly five when I saw a young man coming across the lawn to the terrace where I was sitting—a young man in tennis flannels, such as those I had seen Cyril wear when he started for the tournament that morning; a man of Cyril's height and bulk, but not the least like Cyril in figure or walk, as I saw him in the distance; for this man stooped as Cyril never did, and this man's step had none of the elastic force of Cyril's rapid movements. Yet this man with the bent shoulders and heavy walk was Cyril, and no one else—Cyril transformed by some heavy trouble.

He came slowly to the empty chair at my side, and seated himself in silence, and looked at me with eyes whose expression I can never forget. All frivolous words died on my lips. I could only watch him in mute expectancy.

"Daisy," he began, in a voice that was even stranger than his altered looks, "I think you know that I have loved you, honestly, truly, and dearly."

"I am sure you have, dear," I answered with a sinking heart, knowing that I myself dared not have said as much of my own truth and honesty.

"I have not gone into hysterics about my passion, or written verses, or done any other of the wild things that I might have done had we met as strangers at Venice the other day and fallen in love with each other at first sight. I have taken everything for granted—too much for granted, perhaps. I grew up loving you, from the time I was a lad at school and you a kind of household fairy in a white frock, with bright hair and dove-like eyes. I went on loving you, and claimed you as my own almost as if I had a right to you—as if the trouble of wooing and winning were not for me, since my own true love had been born and reared and educated expressly to make me happy. That is how I felt about you, Margaret, and perhaps I have seemed a tame wooer in consequence."

"No, no, no!" I exclaimed eagerly. "You have been all that

is good and true. It is I who am weak and changeable and frivolous; it is I who am to blame——"

My too-ready tears stopped me. I thought that he had discovered my guilty secret, that he had found out somehow that I had left off caring for him, and had begun to care for Gilbert Florestan. I was going to throw myself on my knees at his feet, when he stopped my uncertain movement with a hand laid heavily upon my arm. I doubt if he had heard one word of my self-accusation.

"That is all over and done with, Daisy," he said, "our wooing at Venice and elsewhere; and all the happy days and hours we have had together; and all our plans for the future; and the rooms that have been made beautiful for us to live in; and the life we were to lead. All those things must be as a dream that we have dreamed, and you must teach yourself to forget me, and to forget that you were ever my promised wife."

Yes, he had found out all the truth, I told myself. My head drooped forward upon my clasped hands, and I had what the Reardon girls call a good cry. They have a good cry about the most contemptible things: if their dressmaker disappoiuts them, or if bad weather prevents an intended tennis-match; but this good cry of mine seemed wrung out of a breaking heart. I felt so sorry for Cyril, so ashamed of myself. I did not for one moment doubt that he had discovered my inconstancy, and that he was setting me free to marry Mr. Florestan, if Mr. Florestan cared to have the reversion of such a worthless weathercock.

"My darliug, don't cry so bitterly," he pleaded, more tenderly than I ever remember him to have doue in all our foolish little love scenes. "You are breaking my heart, and I have ueed to be strong and stern to face a cruel future."

"You think that I am fickle," I said at last, "and not worthy of your trust?"

"*You* fickle? *you* uuworthy?" he cried. "Why, my dearest, I know that you are the truest and purest of creatures. It is no doubt of you that influeuces me. There is an insuperable bar to our marriage; an obstacle with which you aud I have nothing to do."

"Is it my mother who is trying to part us?" I asked wonderingly, for I thought mother might have read my secret. I had never been able to preteud much in my talks with her.

"No, Daisy, your mother has nothiug to do with this matter.

She knows nothing of my determination yet, and I am going to ask you a favour."

"What is that?"

"I want you to let your mother suppose that it is you who have broken the engagement. You can say that you did not know your own mind when you accepted me, that you were too precipitate—the sort of thing girls say pretty often, I believe. I don't think, as society is constituted nowadays, there will be very much astonishment at the alteration of our plans. I hope before a year is over that my darling will have found a worthier lover; and as I shall be far away, no doubt people will soon forget me."

"You will be far away!" I echoed. "Where?"

"In Australia. I shall try to begin a new life on the other side of the world; breed sheep on the Darling Downs, or turn wine grower, Heaven knows what; but anyhow, my future shall be as far remote from my past as distance can make it."

A new light flashed upon me, and I began to think that the question of money was at the bottom of poor Cyril's trouble, and that in honour I was bound to refuse this offered release. However I might wish to cancel the past, I could not be so mean as to break my engagement because my lover had grown suddenly poor.

"I begin to suspect your motive," I said seriously. "Uncle Ambrose has lost his fortune. Its coming was like a fairy tale, and it has vanished like gold in fairyland. Oh, Cyril, surely you know that I never cared about your father's wealth, or thought whether you were rich or poor. Mother and I have plenty of money for all of us."

"My dearest, I know your generous heart. No, it is not a money trouble that has darkened my days; but there is a trouble; and it is one which I must keep locked up in my own breast till I die."

"It is something about yourself," I speculated, pitying him too much to leave the mystery unquestioned; "some mortal disease, perhaps. You have consulted a physician who has told you that you may die suddenly, and you fear to make me unhappy."

"No, Daisy, medical men and I have had few dealings since I was vaccinated. Don't ask any more questions, dear. I dare not tell you more than I told you at first. All is over between us; and my life must be spent thousands of miles away. I could not trust myself within reach of an express train that would bring me back to you."

He bent over me as I sat motionless with wonder, looking at the

bright water and the lights and shadows on the opposite shore. He pressed his lips upon my forehead in a farewell kiss.

"Good-bye, my Margaret, my Pearl, mine no more," he said, and then turned away, and walked slowly across the lawn by the way he had come.

I heard the gate in the fence open and shut, and I knew that he had gone across the road to his father's cottage.

I sat looking at the water in a mute, dull wonder, while quarter after quarter chimed from the old gray tower, and the shadows deepened, and the golden lights grew dim upon beech and oak, and the willows in the foreground changed from green to gray. The footmen carried away the tea-table in their horrid mechanical way, which makes one think that they would clear a table and arrange a room in just the same leisurely fashion if one were lying dead upon the carpet. The evening darkened, and still I sat there wondering and musing. I was free—free to love whom I pleased, free to marry any one who cared to ask for my hand. I had the liberty for which my soul had longed ever since I left Paris. And yet I could not feel glad. I could not be glad, while he was so sorry. Poor Cyril! My first playfellow, my boyish sweetheart, the first admirer who ever told me my face was worth looking at. How well I remembered those first compliments! and how flushed and flattered I felt when the young Oxonian told me he liked the gown I wore, or that my eyes looked dark under the shadow of my sailor hat! How foolish and vain I must have been when I was fifteen and wore my first long gown!

No, I could not be glad. I felt such an impostor. Surely I ought to have confessed the truth in that last moment; I ought to have told him plainly and candidly that my heart had gone from him months ago, and that the fancied treasure which he was renouncing was the poorest thing in the world—a jilt's unstable affection. There might have been some consolation for him in knowing the worthlessness of the thing he surrendered.

And yet, and yet—it might have been cruel to undeceive him. It was better for him, perhaps, to believe that he had received measure for measure, that I had loved him to the last.

"If ever I marry it will be years hence, I dare say," I told myself, "and he will be in Australia, happily married himself before that time."

This was a comforting thought, but even this could not prevent me feeling very unhappy about Cyril and his mysterious trouble.

What was it? Had he gambled? Had he kept race-horses? Had he forged? One hears and reads of things quite as extraordinary as forging on the part of a seemingly honourable young man. And the trouble was obviously a very serious one. It might be some casual forgery, executed on the spur of the moment, after a wine at Christchurch, when the poor, dear fellow hardly knew what he was doing.

I could fancy the whole scene! Some wicked collegian—several years older than Cyril—putting a pen into his hand and making him sign a bond, or an I O U, or a bill or something, with somebody else's name—the Dean's perhaps to redeem his losses at cards. He has often told me how wild they are at Christchurch, and how they throw one another into the fountain, and smash furniture, and play poker, and do all manner of dreadful things. The more I thought of Cyril's unhappiness the more I felt inclined to believe that it must date from his college days. It was a sword that had been hanging over his head for a long time, and the hair had broken to-day.

There was another idea which struck me afterwards, as I walked back to the house. What if Cyril, in a weak, good-natured way, had got himself engaged to another girl, a girl he detested, and felt that honour obliged him to marry her because she was of inferior rank and because he detested her?

This would account for his resolution to go to the other side of the world and begin a new life. He would marry this person and take her straight off to the antipodes, where no one belonging to his own world would ever see him in his disgrace. Poor Cyril! My heart bled for him, as I thought what his life would be like, married to a vulgar woman who would misplace the aspirate, and talk of him as Mr. Harden. It would be too dreadful, and I felt as if I would have rather sacrificed my own happiness than that he should be so utterly lost.

Mother came out of the drawing-room window to meet me as I drew near the house. She had just returned from her visiting, having tasted half-a-dozen cups of tea in half-a-dozen tiny sitting-rooms, and had heard no end of sad stories. Yet she looked happier than usual, for she had been giving happiness to others.

I had been keeping my heart locked against that dear mother for months; but now I was determined to tell her as much of the truth, as I was free to tell. I put my arms round her neck, and laid my bewildered head upon her shoulder.

"Mother dear, you have no need to trouble about that horrid

trousseau," I said, half laughing and half crying; "a change has come over the spirit of our dream—mine and Cyril's. We have agreed that we don't quite suit each other—or at least that we answer better as brother and sister than we ever could as husband and wife—and so—in the friendliest way we have agreed to part. He is going to Australia to look about him! and I am going to stay with you."

I believe I was slightly hysterical after this, and I felt very much ashamed of myself as I heard myself making a ridiculous noise without the power to stop.

Poor mother kissed and comforted me, and scolded me a little, till I quieted down, and then she sat by my side on our favourite sofa to discuss the situation.

"This is very sudden, Daisy," she said, and I saw that she looked grave and troubled.

"It seems sudden," I answered, "but it has been in the air for some time—ever since we left Paris."

"Ever since you left Paris!" repeated mother, as if she saw a light.

"You must have seen that I was reluctant to name any time for my marriage, and that I didn't take the faintest interest in my trousseau."

"Yes, I saw that, and I thought it only meant that my Daisy was less frivolous than most girls."

"It meant that I was a hypocrite and an impostor; that I allowed myself to be engaged to Cyril out of sheer frivolity—mere idle vanity, which made me pleased to have an admirer. For months past I have been chafing against my bonds, and I cannot be too grateful to Cyril for having set me free."

"Did you ask him to release you?" inquired mother, looking at me searchingly with her soft, serious eyes.

I could not tell her a deliberate falsehood, but I could prevaricate, which I dare say is just as bad.

"There was no necessity for me to ask him," I said; "he understood my feelings—we understood each other, perfectly. Don't ask any more questions, mother darling," I pleaded; "at least not about poor Cyril. He will be leaving us very soon, I fear. Indeed, indeed, there is no need for you to grieve," I urged, kissing her sweet, anxious face. "It is better as it is."

"Is it, Daisy?" she exclaimed sadly. "I cannot quite think that. The change seems light to you, but it is a sad breaking up

of home and family ties. The nest has been made ready for the birds, and now they are to part and scatter far and wide. This will be a blow for your step-father. He was so proud of your engagement to Cyril, so happy in the thought of your future union. The disappointment will be bitter for him. And he is out of health, and hardly in a condition to bear a great sorrow."

"I am very sorry on his account," I faltered; "but though I am not to be his daughter-in-law, I shall be always his loving and obedient friend and pupil. I can never forget all that he has been to me from my childhood until now."

"I am glad of that, Daisy," answered the dear mother, her eyes filling with tears. "I should be very sorry if either you or I could be unthoughtful of the best friend widow and daughter ever had in the world, the most unselfish, the most forbearing. You know that my marriage with Ambrose Arden was not a love match. No woman can love a second husband as I loved your father. It was a marriage of friendship, of grateful affection, of unqualified and admiring regard. I wanted to make the remaining years of my friend's life as happy as a woman's tenderness could make them. My only disappointment in this second marriage, my only regret since my wedding-day, has been the fear that in spite of all my care your step-father has not been happy. There is a little rift within the lute, Daisy, and God knows how it came there. It is none of my making."

"Dearest mother, no wife on earth could do more to make a husband's life full of sunshine than you have done," I told her. "If there is some touch of shadow mingled with the light you must not take it to heart. Uncle Ambrose is a scholar and a recluse, a man of peculiar character and temperament, and you must not be surprised if he has intervals of melancholy brooding. A man who reads the modern metaphysicians can only be happy when he has no time for thought. Uncle Ambrose thinks too much, mother. That is the only evil."

She kissed me fondly at this; and I felt somehow that our mutual confidences had drawn us nearer to each other than we had been since her marriage.

"Yes, Daisy, no doubt that is the evil. Ambrose has lived the scholar's life too long to be able to enjoy commonplace pleasures like other men. He is too old to begin a new life. He is like Eugene Aram."

"Eugene Aram?"

"What am I thinking of, Daisy, to compare my husband to a murderer?"

"Ah, but you meant it as a compliment," I told her, laughing; "Eugene Aram was such a delightful murderer. The crime that darkens his past only deepens the interest in his character; and by the time the mystery stands revealed the reader is devoted to the criminal."

"That is only the glamour of the novelist, Daisy. Depend upon it the real Aram was a smooth-faced, canting hypocrite, with murder lurking in his downcast eyes. I cannot believe that any man capable of such a crime could ever win a noble-minded woman like Madeline. She would have shrunk from him instinctively."

We read Bulwer's romance together not long ago, and every detail of the story is still vivid in both our minds.

My mother looked at the clock on the chimneypiece.

"A quarter to eight, Daisy, and we must dress for dinner, and after dinner I must tell your step-father what has happened. He has no idea of it, I suppose?"

"I think not."

"Poor Ambrose, I am sorry for him. No, love, I don't blame you or Cyril," she added hastily, as she saw my look of self-reproach. "It is not your fault, either of you, if you do not love each other well enough to take life-long vows. It is better to have found out the truth in time; but the disappointment will not be less bitter to Cyril's father. It pleased him to believe that his affection for me would be in a manner continued in the coming years by his son's union with my daughter."

"I shall always be fond of Cyril," I said, "as a brother. That has been my only mistake. I fancied sisterly affection meant more than it really did."

"Before you left Paris?" said my mother, looking at me searchingly, until I felt myself turning scorchingly red under that earnest examination. "Run away and dress, Daisy. I hear Ambrose going upstairs to his dressing-room. We shall all be late for dinner."

I ran to my room, three steps at a time. I felt happier than I had been at any time since we left Venice, in spite of all that had been done to make me happy. I was sorry for Cyril, honestly and sincerely sorry, but a burden was lifted off my heart, and I could not wonder that it beat less heavily.

CHAPTER XXI.

"ENOUGH THAT I CAN LIVE."

As Clara Arden anticipated, dinner was late that evening at River Lawn. It was nearly half-past eight when Mr. and Mrs. Arden and Daisy met in the drawing-room. The cook was angry, and the butler had been waiting for nearly half an hour to announce dinner.

"You are looking so pale and so tired, Ambrose," Mrs. Arden said, as they seated themselves in the light of the large central lamp, supplemented with clusters of wax candles, a light in which she could see the colour and expression of his face better than in the chastened lamplight of the drawing-room.

"I don't think that I am any more tired than usual," he answered. "You know what your fashionable physician said of me. You must not expect me to look particularly robust."

"He said that you were not to do much brain-work, Ambrose, and you have been doing nothing else since he saw you."

"Old habits are not so easily put off as doctors pretend to think. They tell the drunkard he must leave off brandy, and they tell the scholar he must live without books, with just the same admirable complacency, as if they were asking very little."

"I'm afraid we ought to leave Berkshire," pursued his wife, looking at him anxiously. "I am sure that you will be better away from your books."

"I shall be ready to leave my books when my own book is finished. I am nearing the end. When that is done I will go where you like."

"It is not where I like, but where you like," she said sadly, "I am happier here than anywhere else."

"Then let us stay here—till the end of our lives. You know what Horace says, Daisy—a man may change his surroundings, but not his mind."

"No, no, I am not selfish enough to keep you here," said Mrs. Arden, "when I see you dispirited and out of health. We will go back to London; we will go to Italy; anywhere."

There was a silence after this, Daisy being more thoughtful than usual, and not offering any diversion by the girlish prattle with which she usually brightened the meal, whether her heart was light or heavy. No word had yet been spoken about Cyril's absence.

The butler had quietly removed the cover laid for him, and the chair in which he was to have sat; but nobody mentioned his name till nearly the end of the meal, when Clara said rather nervously—

"Cyril is dining out, I suppose?"

"He has gone to London," Ambrose Arden answered quietly. "He is not coming back to-night."

Clara looked at him wonderingly as he answered. Had Cyril told his father that his engagement was at an end? She could hardly believe that her husband would have taken the blow so calmly. It was left for her, she thought, to tell him of his disappointment.

Daisy slipped away to her own den as soon as she was free to leave the dining-room, and Mrs. Arden entered the drawing-room alone, and sat there waiting anxiously for her husband to rejoin her. It was very seldom that he lingered in the dining-room after his wife left him, but this evening he was sitting in an abstracted mood at his end of the table, and did not stir when mother and daughter rose and went away. It was perhaps the first time that he had ever allowed his wife to open that door for herself when he was in the room. Absent-minded and dreamy by temperament, he had yet rarely failed in courtesy to the woman who was to him this world's one woman.

He sat with his head bent over the empty dessert-plate, and the untouched glass of claret which the butler had filled. He sat brooding in the lamplight for nearly half an hour; and then, with a deep-drawn sigh, he rose slowly, and went to the drawing-room, where his wife was sitting by an open window looking out at the moonlit water, very sad at heart.

He went over to her and seated himself by her side.

"Cyril is gone from us for good, Clara," he said. "I suppose you know that?"

"I know that all is over between him and Daisy; but I thought you did not know. I feared you would not be able to take the blow so quietly, knowing how pleased you were at their engagement."

"I was pleased because it was a link that drew me nearer to you. It was of *our* union I thought, not theirs. Nothing can touch me, Clara, while I have you."

"Did he tell you why he and Daisy had made up their minds to part?"

"Yes, he told me his reasons."

"And hers. You will blame my daughter for fickleness, I fear, Ambrose."

"Blame her! blame Daisy! Your daughter—and my pupil. Why, she was the bond between us years ago, when I was but the stranger within your gates. My love for your daughter is second only to my love for you."

His wife took up his hand and kissed it, in a rapture of grateful affection.

"How good you are to us, Ambrose!" she said softly. "Harsh words never fall from your lips. If I could only see you happy, my heart would be full of content."

"I am happy, Clara, happy in having won my heart's desire. What can a man have in this world more than that—the one desire of his life, the boon for which he has waited and longed through years of patient, silent hope? If there is happiness upon earth I have attained it."

"I believe your metaphysicians teach you that there is no such thing as happiness."

"Oh, they only preach the gospel of doubt. The whole science of metaphysics consists in the questioning spirit, which analyzes everything, without arriving at any definite conclusion about anything."

"Poor Cyril!" sighed Clara, after a pause of contemplative silence, which seemed in harmony with the stillness of the summer night and the beauty of the moonlit landscape, garden and river, meadow and woodland, and dark church tower. "Poor Cyril!" she repeated. "It seems so sad for him to leave us, to go out into the world as a wanderer; and yet it would be impossible for our old life to go on, now that he has broken with Daisy."

"No, the old life would not be possible. It belongs to the past already. Did he tell Daisy where he was going?"

"To Australia, he said. He consulted with you as to his destination, no doubt."

"No; he told me he should go away; but he did not enter upon his plans."

"Poor fellow! He was very unhappy, I fear."

"He did not confide his sorrows to me. He had made up his mind; and it was not for me to try to change his resolution."

His whole manner altered as he spoke of his son. There was a hardness in his tone that surprised and grieved his wife, who a minute before had done him homage as the most admirable of men. His manner in speaking of her daughter had expressed the utmost tenderness. The tone in which he spoke of his own son was stern

almost to vindictiveness. Clara feared there had been a quarrel between father and son, and that Ambrose Arden had resented the cancelment of Daisy's engagement with an unjust wrath.

"You must not be angry with Cyril," she said softly. "I fear that it is Daisy's fickleness that is the beginning and end of our disappointment. She owned as much to me, poor child. She gave her promise too lightly, and repented almost as soon as it was given, although she had not the courage to confess her mistake."

"Well, we will say it is Daisy's fault, or that both are fickle. There are no hearts broken, I believe. Cyril goes out into the world, a stranger to us henceforward."

"Not a stranger, Ambrose. Your son will always be dear to us both."

"He will be in Australia, where our love or our indifference cannot touch him."

There was a bitterness in his tone which warned Clara to pursue the subject no further. She could not doubt after this that there had been a breach between father and son—that these two who had been so fond of each other and so proud of each other hitherto had parted ill friends. And it was all Daisy's doing, poor little feather-headed Daisy! who should have been a bond of union, but had become the occasion of severance.

Clara Arden felt weighed down by inexpressible sadness as she sat looking out into the moonlit garden, that garden which she and her first lover had found a wilderness, and which he had made into a paradise for her sake. It was her girlish admiration of that old garden by the river which had made Robert Hatrell eager to possess the place. He had laid it at her feet, as if it were a bunch of roses, never counting the cost of anything which pleased her. Had it been ten times as costly a place he would have bought it for her.

His image was with her to-night more vividly than it had been for a long time. It was as if he himself were at hand, in all the warmth and vigour of life, and that she had but to stretch out her arms to beckon him to her. And, oh, with what a heart-sickness of longing and regret she turned towards that idolized image! Face to face with the inexplicable gloom of Ambrose Arden's temper, she recalled her first husband's happy nature, his joyous outlook, and keen delight in life. With him her days had seemed one perpetual holiday. If she ever complained it had been because that energetic temperament took life and its enjoyments at a faster pace than suited her own reposeful temper. But how bright, how

gay those days had been; how frank and open her companion's face; how expansive his speech and manner! He had never hidden a care from her. Were his thoughts light or heavy she shared them, and knew every desire of her heart.

But in this man, this cherished friend of many years, she had discovered mysteries. He had griefs which he would not share with her. He was angry with his only son; they had parted within a few hours, perhaps for all this life; and he would tell her nothing of the cause of their parting, he invited no sympathy. He sat by her side in melancholy silence, and she felt the burden of unhappiness which she was not allowed to share.

"If he would only talk of his trouble, if he would only let me comfort him, I should be twice as good a wife," she thought despondently. "It is not my fault if our lives are growing farther apart."

After this night an emotionless monotony marked Clara Arden's days in the house where her early married life had been so full of happiness, and where her one great sorrow, the sorrow of a lifetime, had come upon her. The idea of going on the Continent for the autumn was not carried out. The scholar's book absorbed him wholly in the waning of the year, and he preferred the quiet of River Lawn to the glory of the Italian Lakes, or the art-treasures of Florence. He spent a good many hours of every day in his old cottage-study, while his wife and her daughter lived very much as they had lived in Mrs. Hatrell's widowhood.

"Your second marriage and my engagement to Cyril seem almost a dream, mother, when you and I are sitting here alone together, and Uncle Ambrose is poring over his books on the other side of the road," said Daisy, as she sat at her mother's feet in the morning-room, pretending to read Lecky's "England in the Eighteenth Century," but looking up every now and then to talk. "I call him quite a perfect husband in his way—never interfering with our plans, never grumbling at his dinner, always courteous and kind and ready to do what we like."

"Yes, he is all goodness to us," answered her mother, "and one would have nothing left to wish for if he were only happy."

"I dare say he *is* happy—in his way, mother—his calm, philosophical way, which used to soothe and tame me in my rebellious fits when I was a child. He was always the same, don't you know? Tranquil and rather mysterious—like deep still water: like Lake Leman, whose depth one would never suspect if one did not see the mountains upside down in the water—suggesting by their

delusive shadows the real depth below. Rely upon it, Uncle Ambrose has all he cares for in this world, having you and his books, and you give yourself groundless trouble when you are anxious about him."

Her mother sighed, but did not answer. She had watched her husband's face with a new anxiety ever since Cyril's departure; and she had seen the lines deepen, and the melancholy droop of the firm lips grow more marked.

No one at River Lawn knew anything about Cyril's whereabouts, unless it was his father. He had left Lamford within a few hours of his interview with Daisy, taking with him only a single portmanteau, as Beatrice Reardon informed her friend, this young lady having a knack of meeting every fly that ever entered or departed from the village.

"It's no use telling me you haven't quarrelled," protested Beatrice, when Daisy denied any ill-feeling between Cyril and herself. "I saw the poor fellow's white face as he drove by, acknowledging my bow in the most distracted manner, and I never saw such a change in any man. A few hours before he had been the gayest of us all on the tennis lawn, and now he looked positively like his own ghost. You must have had a dreadful row, Daisy."

"We had no row, as you call it. We only agreed that it was better for us to part."

"Poor Cyril! I had no idea he was so desperately in love with you. He used to take things so very easily," remarked Beatrice, with all the freedom of friendship. "Of course I always suspected you of not caring a straw for him. You were not the least like an engaged girl. You didn't spoon him a little bit."

Daisy shuddered. She was one of the few girls who are revolted by such forms of speech as prevail in some girlish circles. Miss Reardon affected a fast and slangy manner as a kind of perpetual protest against the dulness and monotony of her life in a Berkshire village. She wanted everybody to understand that there was nothing rustic or pastoral about her mind or her manners.

This was all that Daisy or her mother heard about Cyril's departure. He had gone to his chambers most likely, where he could prepare at his leisure for that long voyage of which he had talked. The greater part of his possessions, his books and guns, and sporting tackle of all kinds were in the Albany. He had his own man to pack for him, and accompany him to a new world, if he was so minded.

CHAPTER XXII.

DAISY'S DIARY.

How peacefully the days have slipped by since poor Cyril went away! I find myself thinking of him and writing of him as "Poor Cyril!" which is really an impertinence, and I dare say by this time he is perfectly happy, and has fallen in love with some magnificent Australian girl, a higher order of being, like the Gy in the Coming Race—a powerfully built creature who can ride buck-jumpers, and camp out in the bush, without fear of consequences. I fear I have very narrow and insular ideas about Australia, which I can only picture to myself as one vast jungle, tempered with convict settlements.

Cyril is happy no doubt by this time, sad as he looked on that day of sudden parting; so I may allow myself to feel happy, with an easy conscience. I should be perfectly happy if it were not for the change in Uncle Ambrose, who has evidently some secret grief, some corroding care which he will not lighten by sharing it with his wife. I can but fear that mother was right in her foreboding, and that he has taken the cancelment of Cyril's engagement sorely to heart. It is his love for mother which is wounded. He wanted a perfect union, that we should be one household, bound by every tie that can make a family circle indivisible. It must be very hard for him too to know that his son, his only child, has been self-banished from his home and his native country.

If my fickleness alone had been to blame; if Cyril had found out my foolish secret, and that the man who was nothing to me was a great deal nearer my heart than my plighted husband; if he had broken with me on this account, my conscience would hardly have been as easy as it is. But I have at least the comfort of knowing that Cyril had some weighty reason upon his own side for parting from me—and that I am not actually to blame for the existing state of things. It was he who took the initiative. It was he who said, "All is over between us."

I have left off puzzling myself with idle speculations about his motive. Whatever his reason may have been, I feel assured that it was very serious and entirely convincing to his own mind—that he obeyed what to him was a stern necessity. I can but be grateful to Providence that has released me from a bond that could not

have brought real happiness to either Cyril or me; and, looking back now at the past, I feel how cowardly I was in not telling him the truth about my own feelings. *He* was no coward. When the hour came in which he felt he ought to break with me, there was no hesitation or wavering on his side; and yet I believe he loved me better in that parting hour than he had ever loved me in his life before. Poor Cyril—old friend and playfellow! I hope his Australian wife will be kind and true, and that his life in that far world may be full of all good things: gold in monster nuggets, sheep in mighty flocks, horses that are not buck-jumpers, woods of eucalyptus, groves of mimosa, birds of vivid plumage, and the most perfect thing in bungalows.

I am really very sad about Uncle Ambrose. I think he fights against the gloom that gathers round him as a strong man stricken in the prime of life by some insidious malady might fight against disease: and yet the gloom deepens. With him low spirits seem actually a disease; and I tremble and turn cold sometimes at the thought that his depression may forebode some mental malady which may darken all our days. My mother seldom, if ever, sees him as I see him when she is not present. When she is with him I know that he makes a stupendous effort to appear cheerful, to seem interested in the things she loves; but when she leaves him the mask drops, and I see him as he really is—a man weighed down by deep-rooted melancholy.

I have talked to him of the books I used to read with him, the low-spirited school of metaphysicians, and of Heine, who saw all things with the saddened eyes of a man whose life was like Pope's, a "long disease." We have talked of theology, and I have discovered the hopelessness of his creed—that for him there is nothing beyond this life of ours, this poor brief life, in which there are so many chances of being miserable against a single chance of being happy. No, for him there is no beyond—for him the dead are verily dead.

I told him yesterday that I believe not only in a world where we shall meet our loved and lost, and know them again, and live with them again in a better and loftier state of being; but that I also believe in the influence of our beloved dead upon our thoughts and actions, even while we are on this side of the veil that parts flesh and spirit.

"That influence is only memory," he said; "it has no other source than your own mind—moved by your own loving heart."

I told him that it was something more than memory—something independent of my own mind or my own heart—an influence that flashed upon me when least I expected it—sudden, mysterious, full of suggestions of another world. I told him that there were moments in which I could feel that my father was with me, that he was loving and pitying me in my weakness as a woman, just as he used to pity me when I was a foolish child.

"A delusion, Daisy," he said—"a delusion like the rest of our dreams. Science has made an end of all such deceptions. The belief in a spirit-world was only possible while mankind remained densely ignorant of the world of sense."

"I know now why you grow sadder as life goes on," I said. "It must be so hard to feel that you are treading a path that only leads to a dead wall; that there is no door in the great cruel wall, no beyond. Thank God, to me it is harder to believe in extinction than in a world to come—a chain of worlds, if you will—a gradual ascent from this life with all its sin and misery, to the highest form of life conceivable. The most elaborate of those systems which you call superstitions seems simpler and easier for my understanding than the barren creed of the materialist."

"That is because you are young, Daisy, and full of enthusiasm, and because you know very little of the world in which you are one happy atom—a joyous mote dancing in the sunshine. You think life is the gift of a beneficent Creator, who holds in reserve future lives, fairer than this, for those who believe in Him and obey Him. That pretty creed comes naturally enough to you who know life only at River Lawn and in Grosvenor Square. But go and look at life in Whitechapel; put yourself into the skin of the women you will see there, and then ask yourself about the beneficent Creator, the Eternal Wisdom, who has made man in His own image. Your rose-water theories would hardly be strong enough to stand that atmosphere. Bradlaugh's vitriol better suits the district."

I told him that it was an old, old argument that because there was so much misery in the world He that made it could not be a just God; or rather that there could be no directing mind above the universe, only unreasoning matter working out its own destiny according to material and immutable laws; that the God who could be moved to pity was the God of children and visionaries only.

"You talk to me as if there had been no misery in *my* life," I said. "Do you forget what it was to me, in my happy childhood, to see the father I loved go out of this house one morning, and

never to see him again? Do you forget what it was to me a year ago to discover the horror of his death? If I could rebel against the Power to which I have prayed ever since I knew what prayer meant, I should have rebelled then."

I could not go on for the sobs that choked me at the thought of my father's cruel death. Uncle Ambrose melted in a moment, and took me in his arms, just as he would have done years ago in one of my childish troubles, and pressed his lips upon my forehead with a kiss that seemed like a blessing.

"Believe, my dearest," he said; "keep always that unquestioning faith which is the gift of the pure in spirit. It is a second sight, Daisy. It is a sixth sense. It is given to the chosen few, God's very elect. To them it is given to conceive and understand the unseen. They are the children of light. Be always of that happy race, Daisy. My reason has nothing to offer in exchange for your clairvoyance. Remember always that if I could not help you to believe—if I could not enter with you into the holy of holies, I never taught you to doubt."

"No, no. I have only known lately that you yourself were without the hope that has sustained mother and me in our dark hours."

He told me that I must not talk of dark hours—that for me life was to be all sunshine; and then, for the first time, he spoke of his disappointment about Cyril and me—touching on the subject very lightly, and, indeed, not mentioning his son's name.

"A little hint of your mother's has helped me to guess your secret, Daisy," he said, "and I love you too well to blame your inconstancy. Your mother and I both think that Mr. Florestan had something to do with the change in your sentiments."

"Something to do with my finding out the truth about my own heart," I said, "and the nature of my mistake. I did not love Cyril less after I had seen Mr. Florestan, and found out somehow that he cared for me. But I knew all at once that my love for Cyril had never been the kind of love that would make me his happy wife. I found out that he could never be more to me than a dear and valued friend—never so much to me as you have been. He could never be the first; and one's husband ought to be the first in one's heart and mind, ought he not, Uncle Ambrose, as mother's husband was?"

I felt so sorry for my thoughtless words when I saw him wince at the mention of my father's name. It was such a heartless thing to say—as if *he* were something less than a husband, as if *he* hardly

counted in my mother's life. I hung my head, deeply ashamed of myself, but feeling that any attempt to unsay what I had said would only make matters worse. And then again words cannot alter the truth. He knows that my mother has never loved him as she loved her cherished dead; that the mere mention of my father's name can move a deeper feeling in her than all her second husband's adoring tenderness.

There was an awkward silence, and then Uncle Ambrose went on gravely and quietly, with infinite kindness—

"I want my pupil and adopted daughter to be happy, even if she cannot be bound any nearer to me by a new tie. Don't be afraid to trust me, Daisy. Remember I was your first friend—after your father and mother, and that you used to tell me all your thoughts and fancies. Try to be as frank to-day as you were in those happy hours when your doll used to sit in your lap and share your history-lesson. You have some reason to believe that Mr. Florestan cares for you?"

"He told me so one day," I faltered. "I was alone in the summer-house in the shrubbery, alone with my books, intending to spend a studious morning. Mr. Florestan found me there, and sat down and began to talk to me; and before I knew what was coming he told me that he was very fond of me, and that he was sure I did not care quite so much as I ought to care for Cyril; and he asked me to cancel my engagement and marry him. I was very angry, and I told him that he had no right to form any such opinion about my sentiments, and that nothing would induce me to break my promise to Cyril."

"Yet you *did* break your promise, very soon afterwards. How did you come to change your mind so speedily?"

This was a searching question, and I felt that I was on dangerous ground. Cyril told me to let people suppose that I had broken our engagement; and to tell the truth would be to touch upon his secret, which he may have wished to keep from his father's knowledge.

"Oh, the cancelment of our engagement arose on the spur of the moment," I replied carelessly. "Cyril and I were of one opinion."

"That is enough, child," Uncle Ambrose answered kindly; "if Florestan is the chosen man, I think he ought to be informed of what has happened, and that the lady he loves is free."

"Oh no, no, no, no!" I cried, in a great fright. "He mustn't be told anything. Why, that would be like putting me up to auction.

If he really cares for me his love will keep. If he rushes off to propose to somebody else—as I have heard of young men doing—that will only prove that his love wasn't worth having. Let him wait, and find out for himself that I am not going to marry Cyril."

"What an arrogant young person you are! But I suppose you must have your own way," said Uncle Ambrose; "only remember, Daisy, that I want to see you happily married to the man of your choice before I die. I want to be sure that I have done all for your happiness that your own father could have done had he lived to bless you on your wedding day."

The deep grave tones of his voice, the solemn expression of his eyes as he turned them upon me, made my heart thrill with love and reverence. Yes, he is a good man, a man in whose character I have never discovered fault or flaw.

"You are not going to leave us for many a year to come," I said. "Indeed, indeed there is no reason that my marriage should be hurried on."

"Yes, Daisy, there is need. I want to see you happy. I want, when I lie down on my bed for the last time and turn my face to the wall, to be able to say to myself, 'At least my little friend Daisy is happy; I have been her friend from the hour she learnt to read at my knees until the hour I gave her to the husband of her choice. No father upon this earth could have been more careful of his daughter's happiness than I have been of hers.' Perhaps in the last hours, when mind and senses grow dim, I may forget that my little pupil ever grew up to womanhood; I may think of you as a child still, flitting about the garden with streaming hair. I may see you thus in the dim past, and not recognize the real Daisy when she stands beside my bed and looks at me with pitying eyes."

These sad forebodings made me cry; and I kissed Uncle Ambrose and tried to comfort him, and felt as fond of him as I used to be when I was a child. I was glad that the old feeling came back, for of late, though I know always that he is my best friend, after my mother, we seem to have been growing further apart; and I have had a curious sense of apprehension when I have been in his company, as if there were some evil influence for me lurking under the gloomy cloud which has darkened his life. To-day I felt only a great pity and a great love, the old confidence and affection which used to fill my heart when I ran across the lawn of a morning to meet him as he came in at the gate. I pitied him, because I began to fear that the shadow that rests upon him is the shadow of a

closing life, and that it is some deep-rooted malady which makes him so joyless amidst our happy surroundings. I fear that his own forebodings may be too surely realized, and that he will never see the quiet, long-spun-out days of a good old age. This thought made me very melancholy after this serious interview; yet it was a great relief to find that he did not disapprove of Mr. Florestan as a lover for me. Who knows? Mr. Florestan may be as fickle as the inconstant moon; and all that impulsive nonsense of his in the arbour may be utterly forgotten on his part, though I remember every syllable. I wonder what he is doing in Scotland. I think he ought to have shot everything shootable in Argyleshire by this time.

CHAPTER XXIII.

WHERE THE GOLD CAME FROM.

Don Pedro Perez, more commonly spoken of in the Parisian world as le vieux Perez, or Perez Peru, was one of the best-known men in Paris; and yet he but rarely appeared in those places where the world of Paris most loves to congregate. In the haunts of pleasure he was almost a stranger. He hung about the side scenes of no Boulevard Theatre; he frequented not the racecourses of Longchamps or Auteuil. He sat late at his club, playing whist; but the club was quiet, and altogether out of the movement; and he was an unknown figure at those more fashionable clubs where fortunes are lost at baccarat. But there was one place where Señor Perez reigned supreme, where his name was a word of fear, his countenance an augury of gain or loss to thousands. That place was the Bourse. There Pedro Perez was as a king among his fellowmen.

He was a Spaniard by birth, though he had lived nearly half a century in Paris, or rather had oscillated between Paris and Madrid during that period. He dealt only in Spanish-American securities. That line was his speciality. There was not the most insignificant railway between the southernmost point of Patagonia and the mouth of the Amazon, between Buenos Ayres and Quito; there was not a silver, diamond, or copper mine within all that vast and varied expanse of territory; there was not a water company or an irrigation company or a company for making patent guano out of surplus

paving-stones, the history and vicissitudes, the exact value or non-value of which Pedro Perez did not know by heart. That withered old finger of his had been in almost every financial pie which had been cooked upon that southern continent. He had been in at the death of more schemes than he could have counted in a business morning. In the earlier stage of his career, before he was rich enough to eschew barefaced fraud, he had been in his own person chairman, board of directors, and advising engineer of more than one railway which never reached a more tangible form of existence than paper and print. Many a scheme had lived, faded, and expired within the limits of a prospectus, while Perez swept the money of the shareholders into his own capacious pocket.

Don Pedro had been only a *coulissier* in those days; but with the progress of time and the suppression of the privileges of those financial sharpshooters—the guerilla band of the noble army of speculators—the Spaniard had put on that electro-plate surface of honesty which very often passes as genuine metal in the world of speculation. Investors followed him and confided in him because of his reputation for acumen and good luck, rather than because they believed that the Pedro Perez of to-day was altogether a different character from that Perez of thirty years ago about whom such queer stories were current.

He had been given the sobriquet of Perez Peru because he was considered as deep and as rich as the deepest mine in that vast Republic, and perhaps partly because his complexion had a tinge of that copper ore in which he had dealt so largely. As Perez Peru he was talked about respectfully even by the Tritons of the Bourse, and watched closely by the eager-eyed Minnows of that great mill, in which money and honour are ground into dust and ashes, and dust and ashes are ground back again into gold and good name.

The first ten years of Perez Peru's financial career had been years of struggle and petty fraud. Petty fraud had failed to make him rich, and timid speculation had only served to keep him like Mahomet's coffin in a middle distance between the heaven of wealth and the hell of poverty. Then came his heroic period, which was short and sharp, bolder speculation and more uncompromising chicanery. Five years of this hazardous adventure, in which he escaped the galleys only by the skin of his teeth, made him a capitalist; and fifteen years as a *coulissier* had educated him in the deepest secrets of finance. There was not a trick of the Stock Exchange which Perez Peru had not at his fingers' ends. He could

stand idle, with his back against a stone pillar, and with his crafty southern eyes looking farther into futurity than any other eyes in that crowded building. All that he touched after this period seemed to turn to gold. It turned to dross afterwards, perhaps; but no till Señor Perez had passed it on to somebody else. He was never known to buy too soon or to hold too long. In a word, he was financial wisdom personified.

In all the monotonous years in which the Stock Exchange was his only temple, the share list his only Bible, Pedro Perez had lived with an almost Spartan simplicity; not because he begrudged himself the cost of luxurious living, for personal expenditure, however profuse, would have hardly made a perceptible impression upon his income. He spent little because he cared for making money and did not care for spending it. He had lived in the same house in the Rue Vivienne for the forty years of his Parisian life. The house was within a hundred yards of the Place de la Bourse, and it suited him. The only difference that he had made in those forty years was to descend gradually from the scanty seclusion of a single garret to the space and comfort of the entire first floor. He had breakfasted at the Restaurant Champeaux during the greater part of the last thirty years. In his decade of probation he had fed only in his attic, or in some cheap restaurant on the Rive Gauche, where he wandered in the cool of the evening, thoughtful and solitary even before his thirtieth year. The man was the financial instinct incarnate. The passion for abstract mathematics which possesses some brains, in his took the more vulgar form of money-getting; but the mathematical genius was there to a high degree, and some of his combinations were worthy of Newton or Laplace.

For five and thirty years of his Parisian career Pedro Perez had never been found guilty of a caprice. He was closely observed, as the representative of great wealth always is observed, in an age which has Mammon for its master-devil; but he had never been surprised in any of those follies whlch sometimcs diversify the lives of the wisest men. He had come to be looked upon as a money-making machine, inexorable as steel and adamant, working always in the same grooves, relentless, unvarying; when all at once the report was circulated that Perez Peru had come back from Madrid with a "harem," and for more than nine days, Perez Peru's harem was the standing joke in the cafés where the Bourse is paramount. Perez Peru's harem was the subject of a caricature in the most

audacious of the little journals of Paris. Perez Peru's harem was the theme of a comic song, almost as popular as the later "Gendre de M. Grévy."

The harem upon closer inquiry was found to consist of three women whom Perez had established in a second floor in the Rue St. Guillaume. A mother and daughter, both handsome, the daughter eminently so; a cousin, plain and dowdy, or, if not absolutely plain, faded and elderly.

The three women were seen one night in a box at the opera, the young beauty resplendent in amber satin and diamonds. Every lorgnette was turned to that box, and for the next three days all Paris talked of the dark beauty with the diamonds.

"She was wearing the wealth of Peru upon her neck and arms," said the *boursicotiers* and their following.

After this Dolores was rarely visible to the eye of all Paris. If she went to a theatre or an opera, and she was but seldom allowed that privilege, she was made to sit deep in shadow, as closely curtained from the public gaze as if she had been the Pearl of Istamboul, chief light of some jealous Pasha's harem.

Her story had but few elements of mystery, albeit her secluded life gave a flavour of the mysterious to her personality. She had been bargained for by Pedro Perez as sordidly as any Eastern slave that was ever sold in a public market-place. The girl and her mother had been living in poverty, in one of the obscurest quarters of Madrid, a region where the Cholera fiend and the Fever fiend find their choicest pasturage, where the reaper Death gathers his richest harvest. They had arrived in Madrid some years before with an appearance of ample means, and for a year or two Madame Quijada had occupied an apartment in a fashionable quarter, and had shown herself daily on the Prado, well-dressed, observed, and admired. She was taken to be an adventuress and a free lance; but no one troubled himself about her antecedents. The police had an eye upon her for the first few months, but could find nothing suspicious in her manner of life. Dolores was at a convent during the five or six years in which she grew from childhood to girlhood. It was the best educational establishment in the neighbourhood of Madrid, and as the mother's funds got low she pinched herself in order to provide for her daughter's board and education with the good nuns, who, albeit simplicity itself, had a talent for making out a bill of extra charges, over and above the somewhat heavy *pension*.

Madame Quijada was not alone during these years of her daughter's education. Shortly after her arrival in the Spanish capital she was joined by a niece, who from that time shared her fortunes, good or bad. The niece was introduced to Madame Quijada's acquaintances as Louise Marcet, and she was said to have but recently recovered from a brain fever, which had seriously affected her mind and memory. Her aunt told her friends in confidence that this orphan niece of hers had been disappointed in love, and that her illness had been the outcome of her disappointment. However true this may have been, it was beyond question that a more miserable-looking woman than Louise Marcet at this period could hardly be found on this planet, where if people sometimes take their pleasures sadly they very often take their griefs gaily.

The time came when the widow's cruse would hold out no longer, and when it became necessary to withdraw Dolores from the fashionable convent. The good nuns affected a holy simplicity in their accounts, and they gave no credit.

Dolores was now eighteen, beautiful, carefully educated, fairly accomplished. She went from the pure atmosphere and perfect comfort of a well-organized educational establishment to a shabby lodging in a sordid quarter. She went from all the refinements of life to all that is ugliest in the domain of Poverty. The change was a shock which youthful selfishness felt keenly. Perhaps Madame Quijada was not sorry that her daughter suffered from the misery of her surroundings. It might prepare her mind for the crisis to which her mother looked forward.

Pedro Perez was almost as well known in Madrid as he was in Paris; and he was perhaps even more profoundly reverenced in the less wealthy capital. Madame Quijada had contrived to force herself upon his notice, but she had approached him with a modesty which flattered his self-esteem. She had besought his counsel and assistance in certain little investments, so small in amount that the great financier was provoked to smile—he who so rarely smiled—at her simplicity. Such small investments had been his stepping-stones to fortune—such simple creatures as this shabby-genteel widow had put their little savings in those rotten enterprises of which Pedro Perez had been both the dazzling Alpha and the dark Omega. It was said in Paris that if you could squeeze Perez Peru's gold hard enough, blood would come out of it, by a lesser miracle than the squeezing of the blood of Christian martyrs out of the

earth-floor of Nero's amphitheatre—the blood of broken-hearted widows, and starving orphans, the blood of the swindler's dupes.

The widow's tongue was soft and insinuating, and for almost the first time in his life Perez was moved to a benevolent action. He lent this simple lady fifty louis to invest in an Argentine Railway—lent fifty louis without security and without interest—but on second thoughts he insisted upon holding the scrip.

"Women are so shortsighted," he said, after making this condition, "you would be selling at the first rise. These shares are worth holding."

Madame Quijada was in sore need of fifty louis, but it aided a certain plan of hers that Señor Perez should hold the stock. It gave her a right of approach to him. His image had dwelt in her mind ever since she came to Spain, as the image of wealth incarnate. She had dreamed her dream about this rich lonely old man; and the hour for the realization of that dream was at hand.

She wrote him a piteous letter about a fortnight after Dolores left the convent, telling him she was too ill to leave her wretched home, and she was in want of money. She believed that the dividend upon her Argentines was nearly due. It would only amount, she supposed, to a couple of louis, but forty francs would save her and hers from starvation. She had now three mouths to fill. Her daughter had been withdrawn from the convent where she had grown up, and was sharing the discomforts of her wretched lodging.

Pedro Perez was not given to acts of charity, and was not in the habit of caring whether his fellow-creatures dined or starved; but Madame Quijada had contrived to impress him with the idea that she was a remarkably clever woman, and that the world would be the poorer for her loss. She had flattered him with such subtle comprehension of his character that he, who had been the mark of abject flattery for a quarter of a century, found himself listening with a pleased air to this gifted woman's enthusiastic laudation of his talents as a financier, and of that latent genius which would have made him greater as a politician or a diplomatist than he had ever been on the Stock Exchange.

Had the flatterer been old and ugly, even feminine subtlety might have failed to win his ear; but Madame Quijada was still handsome and still young enough to seem attractive in the eyes of a man who had passed his sixtieth birthday. He was not in love with her; but he thought her a remarkably attractive woman, and instead of

sending her fifty francs by his servant, he went himself to see in what kind of a den so much ability had found shelter.

He went, saw Dolores in all the splendour of her fresh young beauty, and was conquered. He had never known what it was to feel his heart beat quicker at the sight of a woman's face till he saw Madame Quijada's daughter. He was subjugated at once and for ever. His instinct urged him to make as hard a bargain as he could with the girl's mother; but the settlement to which he finally consented was more than princely. Princes are seldom so generous. Had Madame Quijada insisted upon his sacrificing his last penny he would have done it sooner than lose the woman he loved. Had she insisted upon his marrying her daughter he would have done it. Indeed, the chief consideration that prevented his offering to make Dolores his wife was his keen dread of ridicule, and the consideration that he could keep a mistress under closer surveillance than he could a wife. He knew that he was ugly and elderly, and that the girl he idolized could but be to him as a slave. He could not hug himself with the hope that he might some day win her heart. He was a cynic by long years of contempt for his fellow-men—by the habit of a life unsoftened by friendship or affection, by the love of kindred or compassion for the poor. He tried to rest content in his cynicism now; and he told himself that he was as well off as the mighty Shah Jehan, or any other Mohammedan potentate.

He selected the Rue St. Guillaume as a neighbourhood remote from the gay and popular Paris of the Boulevards and the Rue de Rivoli, in which the casual English or American visitor delights; far also from the Champs Elysées and the Parc Monceaux, with their residential population of fashionable artists, and Bohemians of all kinds. The Rue St. Guillaume was old-fashioned, sober, and eminently respectable. He chose a suite of apartments in a grave old house, with an inner quadrangle—a house so grave and silent that the stone quadrangle might have been a cloister. He furnished the rooms with a sombre luxuriousness, and he offered the cage to his snared bird with an air of devoted submission which might have beguiled her into forgetfulness of the bars which shut her in from all the outer world. Upon Madame Quijada he imposed the duty of keeping guard over his sultana. The girl's lightest whim was to be studied and indulged, so long as that whim did not lead to the gay outer world and its frivolous associations. Dolores was to be a queen; but her kingdom was to be within stone walls. She was only to take air and exercise under conditions of supreme prudence.

She was never to flaunt her beauty in the Bois de Boulogne at the fashionable hour of the day; but Madame Quijada had a carriage at her disposal, in which mother and daughter might drive in the less frequented suburbs of Paris, or in the Bois, at an hour when all Paris was elsewhere. These restrictions were hard upon a girl of eighteen, newly emancipated from the monotonous rules and regulations of a convent-school, and panting for liberty.

"El Santo Corazon was a prison," she complained, "but at least I had fellow-prisoners of my own age. This is solitary confinement."

She chafed bitterly against the dreariness of her life, and she detested the man who had made himself her master; but her mother's stronger character had acquired complete dominion over her, and she had neither strength of will nor courage to rebel against her chains. She submitted to her fate. She wore the jewels which were her badge of slavery; she gratified her girlish fancy in surrounding herself with the loveliest flowers that the South sent to Paris; and she might, perhaps, have grown reconciled to her position, and with but the slightest persuasion might have induced Pedro Perez to give her the name and status of wife, if she had not been so unhappy as to fall in love with her cousin, Leon Duverdier.

During the first year of her residence in Paris, Duverdier was a frequent visitor in his aunt's salon. He was about forty years of age, handsome, audacious, plausible, more seductive in his riper years than a younger lover would have been, because more experienced in the artifices that fascinate a romantic girl. He had newly returned from Spanish America, where he had been living a roving and adventurous life, now in one state, now in another, making money no one knew exactly how, but a familiar figure at the gaming-tables of every city in which he had his abode.

He came to Paris, set up his laboratory, and described himself as an experimentalist and inventor, on the high road to great and useful discoveries. Perez knew of the relationship between Duverdier and the Quijadas, and had met Duverdier on the Bourse; but he did not know that this handsome cousin was a frequent visitor in the Rue St. Guillaume, since the younger man's visits were always so timed as to avoid the Master of the Prison-house. Had it been otherwise, the old man's jealousy would have been quick to take alarm.

In her utter ignorance of life, Dolores turned to her cousin as the representative of all that is most fascinating and most interesting in

the outer world. His flashy and superficial cleverness passed as the versatility of a born genius; she believed all that he told her of his scientific day-dreams, and accepted his inchoate experiments as the first stages in the career of greatness. He was just young enough and just handsome enough to win the heart of a girl who had no opportunity of comparing him with more distinguished men. It was the policy of his life to make love to every pretty woman who would listen to him, and he had even condescended to fascinate ugly women who were likely to be of use to him. He had gone through life, from his eighteenth year upwards, basking in the smiles of beauty, and relying upon the favour of the gentler sex to carry him safely over the obstacles in the adventurer's road through life. Was it likely, then, that he would neglect his opportunities with Dolores, a lovely and inexperienced girl who had the command of one of the deepest purses in Paris?

He had too holy a fear of his aunt to approach his cousin in the guise of the seducer; but he contrived to win her affections, as if unawares, and she was perhaps all the more blindly in love with him because he had never asked her for her heart. He always affected to respect her relations with Perez, and he told her bluntly that her mission in life was to make the financier her husband.

"It is your own fault that the marriage has not come off ages ago," he said; and then, when the girl answered him only with a deep sigh, it was his task to console her, his task to talk of the happiness which might have been had his lot in life been different.

"I am little better than a pauper," he told her, "and my life is full of bitter memories. No woman who values her own happiness should link her lot with mine."

Dolores pondered over that phrase, "bitter memories," and she interpreted it after her own fancy, which told her that Leon's youth had been blighted by some dark love story, a tale of fatal passion and broken hearts, such as she was reading about daily in the novels which were her chief recreation.

There were times when he talked, in dark hints and unfinished sentences, of his past experiences—the women who had loved him and broken their hearts for him; the one woman, beautiful, high-placed, a star of loftiest magnitude, whom he had loved, and in vain.

The girl listened and believed, weak as water, loving him all the more because her love was unreturned. He was full of tenderness for her by fits and starts; but he gave her to understand that he could never again love as he had loved that great lady who had

flung away name, country, home, and reputation for his sake, and who had died a tragical death in the morning of their love.

Duverdier's visits to the Rue St. Guillaume had not been altogether disinterested. He had gone there in times of financial difficulty, and he had extorted more than one so-called loan from Madame Quijada, and had obtained several smaller sums of money, freely and gladly given, from Dolores, who had never been entrusted with the command of large means, and who dared not part with a single jewel from among Perez Peru's splendid gifts, as he had a troublesome way of passing her diamonds in review every now and then.

He would write to her in the course of the day to tell her that he was going to dine with her in the evening, and that he would like to see her in black velvet and diamonds; and Dolores shrewdly suspected that this was only his manner of assuring himself that she had made away with none of his gifts. These magnificent gems had often passed under Duverdier's hands. He had sat in eager contemplation of their pure white brightness as they lay in their open cases on the table before him.

"They are worth a fortune, Dolores," he said, "but they are of very little use to you—of less use than toys to a child. The child can amuse itself with the toys, but you can do nothing with the diamonds. It is not worth the trouble of wearing them when there is nobody to admire you."

"Oh, but they are very pretty," the girl answered childishly, "and I like to have them. Perez told me that there are only about half a dozen women in Paris who have such diamonds, and they are all great ladies."

"Perez told you a lie," her cousin answered harshly. "What of the rich Americans, the men whose money has been made in pork or petroleum, and who give their wives diamonds of six times the value of yours? Perez is an impostor."

He shut the case with a sharp snap. Those diamonds always made him angry. The thought of all that money locked up in velvet and morocco, or shining upon the neck and arms of a girl, aggravated him to madness. He was always in want of money. He had had a run of luck on occasions, and had rioted for a brief space in the possession of wealth—but it was the wealth of to-day, not of to-morrow, and the next turn of luck had left him penniless.

He looked at those diamonds on his cousin's neck with hungering eyes, and the thought of them haunted him in his dreams. The

image of that waxen neck haunted him too; and he saw it sometimes with one cruel hand upon it, holding it as in an iron vice, while another hand tore off that dazzling necklace.

Once in a distempered dream he saw the same fair neck streaming with blood. He hurried to the Rue St. Guillaume early next morning, almost expecting to hear of a calamity; but nothing evil had happened. Dolores met him with a smile, surprised at his early visit.

"I had a horrid dream about you," he said, and she saw that he was ghastly pale. "Where do you keep your jewels?" he asked later, when they had been talking of indifferent subjects.

"Oh, that is mother's business. She has all sorts of contrivances for taking care of them."

"I'm afraid, in spite of all her contrivances, you'll be robbed some day," Leon answered moodily.

Yes, she would be robbed, he told himself. Some vulgar thief would get to know of the wealth that was stowed away in those dull old rooms—wealth in its most concentrated and portable form—and he, her cousin, who had such need of a share in the old financier's spoil, would be told that those jewels had vanished as swiftly and silently as if some wicked fairy had changed them into withered leaves.

Madame Quijada did all she could to discourage her nephew's visits, but some reason, known only to herself, restrained her from actually shutting her door against him; and Dolores always welcomed him gladly, appear how and when he might. If he was moody, she sympathized with him, pitying griefs he did not take the trouble to explain. If he was rude, she bore with his rudeness. For her he was just that one man upon earth who could do no wrong. Fate and Fortune were to blame for using him badly.

It was now nearly four months since she had seen him. A brief note had told her that he was leaving Paris; that he was likely to be a wanderer upon the earth, and that it might be years before they met again. She was in despair at this cruel farewell; and sent her mother to his lodgings to find out what had become of him. On her first visit Madame Quijada heard only the same statement that had been made to the officer of police, but on going a month later she found the nest despoiled. The law had made a clearance of all Duverdier's effects, at the suit of his chief creditor. The apartment was to be let, and nobody knew or cared what had become of its late tenant.

The change in Dolores after her cousin's disappearance was too obvious to escape the keen eye of Perez. He had always known that she did not care for him; that she submitted to her slavery as a fate which she was too weak to resist; that she loved ease and luxury, jewels and flowers too well to run away from her gilded nest into that bleak world of the hewers of wood and drawers of water, that hard world which to her ignorance must have seemed as terrible as the wilderness to the dwellers in cities. He knew that he held her by the most sordid of ties—the love of wealth and the fear of penury. He had seen her listless, weary, indifferent; but he had never until lately seen her absolutely unhappy; and jealous doubts were soon aroused by that inexplicable change. He suspected an intrigue of some kind, and set a private detective to watch the house in the Rue St. Guillaume; but the man discovered nothing. No suspicious person was seen to approach the house, nor did Mademoiselle Quijada ever go out alone. He questioned her closely. He told her that he was sure she had some secret grief, and he urged her to confide in him. She protested that there was nothing the matter. She was tired of Paris. That was all. Her life was monotonous enough to make any one unhappy. He had no need to look further for the cause of her low spirits.

"I am going to Madrid next week. Will you go with me?" asked Perez.

"Yes, yes. I shall be delighted."

Her face lighted up with pleasure. She gave her master one of those rare smiles which repaid him for the richest gift he could offer her.

She was thinking that Leon had most likely gone to Madrid, and that she would find him there. She thought she could not be in the same city with him, and yet not contrive to bring him to her side. She would make her mother hunt him out for her, even if she herself were allowed only to change one prison for another.

Her whole manner altered. She became gay and talkative, and discussed the journey. How soon would they start? She was dying to go.

"You want to see your old schoolmates, I suppose," said Perez, "to make them envious of your jewels and your beauty?"

"Yes, yes, I want to see them all again," she answered carelessly.

"But I cannot have you gadding about Madrid any more than about Paris," said Perez. "The Spanish capital is almost as wicked as the French."

"Mother can go and find my old companions. They may come to see me, I suppose?"

"Surely, Dolores, you would not receive any of your convent comrades in your position?" said her mother severely. "Do you forget that to those girls—honoured and happy wives, perhaps, now—you would seem an outcast? They would have nothing to say to you."

Perez looked embarrassed. It was the first direct attack that Madame Quijada had ever made upon him in the guise of an injured parent. The bargain he had made with her had been arranged upon purely commercial principles—honour so much—maternal affection so much—beauty so much. Even the injured feelings of the defunct Quijada, who might in some distant planet be aware of what was happening here, had been considered. The sum total had been large; and Perez was therefore unprepared for an outburst of wounded humour.

Dolores shrugged her shoulders, and gave an impatient sigh. She was not endowed with fine feelings, and cared very little whether the link that bound her to a master she hated was or was not sanctioned by Holy Church. The good opinion of the world would not compensate for an alliance with age and ugliness.

"Your diamonds must go to my office while we are away," said Perez, after an embarrassed pause. "I have burglar-proof safes there which will accommodate all your jewel-cases. I will take them away with me to-morrow, and lock them up with my own hand."

"And what am I to wear while I am in Spain?"

"Ah, I forgot. You want to astonish your old friends. Well, keep the sapphires I gave you a little time ago, and a few of your smaller trinkets. The diamonds must be made secure before we start. It would be dangerous to travel with jewels of such value."

"Duchesses carry their diamonds everywhere," said Dolores.

"And duchesses are often robbed—sometimes by their husbands, sometimes by their servants, and occasionally by professional thieves. You had better take my advice in this matter."

Dolores submitted with an air of indifference, and Perez departed, promising to fetch the jewel-cases on the following day.

He came and was told that Dolores was too ill to see him. She had changed her mind. She did not care about going to Madrid. The possibility of meeting people who had known her in her innocent girlhood was hateful to her. This was the gist of what Madame

Quijada told him, with much circumlocution, and with some tears wrung from a mother's wounded heart.

Seeing that he listened to her reproaches with patience, and that there was an expression of real distress in his withered old face, Madame Quijada pursued the subject still further. He was breaking her daughter's heart, she told him. He had but to open his eyes and he would see that she was drooping and dying by inches in that dismal prison-house. The sense of a false position, to a girl brought up in the convent of El Santo Corazon, was unendurable. Diamonds were as dross, material comforts were of no account. The blighted breath of dishonour had passed over the fair young life, and it was slowly withering away.

Perez heard and pondered. He idolized Dolores, and there was positively no obstacle to his marrying her, except his keen dread of ridicule, the idea of being laughed at by all Paris as the wealthy dotard with a girl-wife—the fear that if she were once his wife she would insist upon flaunting her beauty in the full glare of the wickedest city in the world, or that city which seemed so to him.

"If I were to marry her she would lead me a wretched life," he said, after some meditative pacings about the spacious salon; "she would take advantage of her secure position; she would plunge into the vortex of frivolous pleasures; she would drag my name in the mud, perhaps."

"You have known her long enough to know how simple her ideas are, how easily she is contented."

"That is all very well now that she is under restraint. How can I tell what she would be if she had the authority of a wife?"

"Keep her as a slave then, and let her fade and die. Do not reproach me when the end comes."

There was much more to the same purpose—and the result was total surrender upon the part of Pedro Perez. He would marry Dolores at the Mairie as soon as the law allowed. All he stipulated was that she should continue to lead a life remote from the crowds and amusements of fashionable Paris.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A GLOOMY RETROSPECT.

PEDRO PEREZ and his beautiful wife started for Madrid upon the evening after their marriage. They travelled with all the comfort that wealth can give. Dolores had her mother and her maid as duenna and attendant. They went to the best hotel in Madrid, where, at the instigation of his wife and mother-in-law, Perez engaged the handsomest suite of rooms upon the first floor.

His dread of ridicule, his jealous doubts and suspicions, prompted him to hide the treasure that he had won for himself; but some natural pride intervened, and he could not refrain from showing himself in the fashionable drives and promenades, with his lovely young wife by his side. Gradually it became known to all the financial world of Madrid that the beautiful girl who went about with Pedro Perez was actually his wife, and visits of ceremony and congratulation became frequent in the amber satin salon *au premier*.

Madame Perez accepted the situation with perfect equanimity, and showed to better advantage as a wife than as a beautiful bird in a gilded cage. If she was not entirely happy she was at least better contented with herself and her life than she had been in the Rue St. Guillaume. So far from repenting his marriage, Perez grew daily more devoted to his wife and more anxious to gratify her. He submitted to all Madame Quijada's exactions, and allowed himself to be led by the nose by his mother-in-law as well as by his wife, and in this placable disposition he returned to Paris, where he at once occupied himself with the task of selecting a home that should be worthy of a millionaire's young and lovely wife.

Everybody whom he knew in Paris had heard of his marriage, and he had to submit to the congratulations of his acquaintances, which, as he was particularly shy, were agony to him. He also had to endure a good many sly thrusts in the papers, and more than one caricature of *La Belle et la Bête;* but he bore it all, and after a week or two consented to mount an elegant Victoria with a pair of matchless blacks, and to show himself in the Bois at the fashionable hour. A coupé was being built for Dolores, and a second pair of blacks was being looked for, Madame Quijada and her daughter being of opinion that a stud to be distingué must be of one colour

After looking at a good many houses, Perez finally decided upon one in the somewhat solitary Avenue Reiffschossen, which had been built for a famous actress during the palmy days of the Empire—the avenue being then known as the Avenue Hortense—and which was at least a mile from the Arc de Triomphe. The house stood at some distance from the road, and was concealed by a screen of acacias and other ornamental trees and shrubs. The garden had been carefully laid out, and the stables had been the particular care of the first proprietor, who was a connoisseur in equine arrangements. This Italian villa, with its grounds and dependencies, had cost a fortune, but it was offered to Pedro Perez for about a fourth part of the original cost. He liked the property, in the first place because it was a bargain, and in the second place because its solitary position gratified his idea of retirement with the wife of his choice. He did not want to live in the heart of Paris, where Dolores might be encouraged to set up a salon, and where the men he knew might find it too convenient to visit his handsome wife. That solitary Italian villa, with its screen of foliage, inconveniently remote from the busy haunts of men, was the very home he desired.

Dolores and her mother both admired the house, and both complained of its surroundings. The neighbourhood was a desert. It was on the wrong side of the Bois for fashion and beauty. Like all bargains, the property was hardly worth having.

For once in a way Perez was firm in opposition to his wife's wish. He would buy that house and no other.

"If you would rather go on living in the Rue St. Guillaume," he said, "I won't interfere."

"I detest the Rue St. Guillaume," replied Dolores petulantly; so the Italian villa in the Avenue de Reiffschossen was bought, and Dolores was allowed to furnish the new house after her own fancy, and without any consideration of cost. Only in one matter did her husband exercise his authority, and that was in the choice of the household. All the servants were engaged by him at an office in Paris; but he allowed Louise Marcet to assist him in his choice, and to be present during the negotiations. She was to be housekeeper in the new villa, having shown a talent for management and economy in the Rue St. Guillaume. Madame Quijada was allowed to choose her own suite of apartments on the ground floor, in a wing beyond the principal rooms, which were vestibule, salon, dining, and billiard-room. Dolores had her boudoir, bedroom, dressing, and bath-room on the first floor, while her husband had a corresponding set of

rooms in the opposite wing. There were two small rooms at the back of the house, on the same floor, divided only by a narrow passage from the suite occupied by Dolores, and these were appropriated to Mademoiselle Mareet, as sitting-room and bedroom. A servants' staircase at the end of the passage brought her in easy communication with the offices below, and enabled her to exercise a useful surveillance upon the household. The servants' bedrooms were on an upper story, almost hidden by the classic ornamentation of the roof.

An open loggia formed the central feature of the façade, and divided the apartments of the master and mistress of the house, offering a means of communication in summer time, and a neutral ground where husband and wife might meet in their idle hours. Dolores was full of plans for decorating this loggia in an Oriental style, so soon as spring should revisit the land. A Parisian winter did not promise much enjoyment from an open loggia, however architectural and Italian.

The installation in the Villa Perez took place very quietly, though both mother and daughter had suggested a ball, or at least an evening party, in honour of *la pendaison de la crémaillère*. Perez reminded them that they knew scarcely half a dozen people in Paris, and asked where their guests were to come from if they were to give a party.

"Madame Perez has only to hold up her finger in order to fill her salon," replied Madame Quijada, with dignity, "or, in other words, you have but to say to one of the best-known Parisians at your club, 'My wife is going to give a party, and I want you to send out two or three hundred cards of invitation on her part,' and the thing is done. We shall give music, supper, and wines that people will talk of for a week; and after that everybody in Paris will want to come to the Villa Perez."

"A very excellent way of squandering money, and courting discomfort," answered Perez, tartly. "I bought this house for my wife and myself, not for all Paris."

"I foresee that we shall be as dismal here as we were in the Rue St. Guillaume," sighed Madame Quijada, who did not forego a mother-in-law's privilege of saying disagreeable things.

Finding that society was still forbidden fruit, Madame Quijada sank into a slough of sensuous pleasures, and rejoiced in her luxurious surroundings, her daughter's cordon-bleu, and her son-in-law's wine cellar. She began to regard the midday déjeûner and

the seven-o'clock dinner as the two chief events of the day. She did ample justice to the produce of Burgundy and Bordeaux, nor did she ever forego the dainty goblet of Chartreuse or Curaçoa, which marked the close of the meal—a miniature goblet from which Titania herself might have drunk, only Titania would hardly have refilled the glass so often. In the afternoon Madame Quijada enjoyed her siesta in true Spanish fashion. In the evening she was more alert, and played écarté with her daughter for small stakes, which she generally won. If Dolores would not play, there was always the *souffre douleur* Louise, who had the whole charge of the household on her shoulders, and who had to please the three people who constituted the family. Madame Quijada had given over the entire duty of housekeeping to her niece, and rarely rose from her easy-chair except to be driven in her daughter's Victoria, or to go to a theatre in the luxurious coupé, when Perez was disinclined to escort his wife.

Nothing had been heard of Leon since his disappearance, and his aunt's most earnest desire was that she should never see his face or hear his name again. There were episodes in her life which she wanted to forget, now that she had attained to that respectability with which wealth can cover the most doubtful antecedents, as with a royal mantle. It was in search of oblivion that she filled and refilled the little Venetian goblet after déjeûner, or dinner; and there were times when she felt that all the Chartreuse the good monks ever distilled would hardly be strong enough to drown certain haunting memories.

Perez Peru noted his worthy mother-in-law's indulgence in the pleasures of the table, and remarked upon this weakness to his wife.

"If you don't look after your mother, she'll take to drinking," he said one evening, as they drove to a boulevard theatre, leaving Madame Quijada sitting opposite Louise at the little card-table, with flushed cheek and glittering eye.

"Bah, if she has just *une pointe* now and then it can't matter," replied Dolores, carelessly. "Her dinner is the only thing that amuses her. You won't let us give parties, or know any amusing people. You have banished even the poor old Duturques. They were dull, but they were alive, and they were better company than chairs and tables."

"You are very ungrateful, Dolores," Perez answered, with a

piteous look. "I have refused you nothing, except to change my manner of life. I have always loved solitude, and hated strange faces. I should not be a millionaire if I had not possessed the power of self-concentration, of living on my own thoughts."

"But now you are a millionaire—and three times a millionaire—you ought to enjoy life."

"To enjoy life is to live quietly with you—to have you all to myself, not to see you surrounded with young people, who would despise your old husband, and teach you to despise him. You talk about giving balls, Dolores. Can you not conceive what torture it would be to me to see you dancing with young men—handsome, fascinating, unprincipled, relentless in their pursuit of the women they admire? Men who would talk of you at their clubs, compare you with the vilest of your sex, discuss your every charm, lay wagers about you—as to who should be your favoured lover, and how soon you could be persuaded to dishonour your husband. I could not endure to see you admired, knowing what admiration means among the young libertines I meet on the Bourse, men who seek to make money only that they may squander it upon women a little viler than themselves. You cannot understand what an old man's love is, Dolores—how jealous, how exacting. You forget how poor a recompense age ever gets for its devotion to youth."

"I don't mean to be ungrateful," Dolores answered, with a deep sigh; and then she turned her head away from her husband, and studied the passing carriages, the *flâneurs* upon the broad asphalte pavement, the glitter and splendour of the shop windows, shops that seemed designed only for the accommodation of millionaires.

She was going to the theatre in all her glory of jewels—diamond stars in her hair, a necklace of single stones, each gem worth a *rosière's* dower, diamond serpents in single, double, and treble coils winding up her slim round arm. She wore a simple evening toilette of some black gauzy material, but the Chantilly lace upon her gown was only second in value to the gems on her neck. When a beautiful young woman marries age and ugliness she can at least assert the claims of beauty by spending her husband's money royally.

The theatre was the Ambigu, where a new comedy of Sardou's had just made a hit, and where all Paris was crowding nightly. Dolores was indignant when she found that the box her husband had secured for her was only a small one on the pit tier, where neither her beauty nor her diamonds could be adequately seen.

He had his old fancy for these shadowy little boxes, where it pleased him to hide his enchantress from the vulgar eye; but in spite of these jealous precautions, Madame Perez was already known and talked about as *la belle aux diamants.*

Her husband's reputation as a triple millionaire gave a special interest to her jewels. People gloated upon gems which might have cost half a million, if Perez pleased. He could have spent half a million, reduced his fortune by a sixth, without feeling any poorer. "He could make as much in a week if he chose to start a new mine," said the *flâneurs* on the Bourse. "He has but to write a prospectus, and the money pours in like water. He has a Golconda in his ink-pot."

While Perez and his wife were laughing at Sardou's biting wit, Madame Quijada was winning Louise Marcet's half-francs by her astute and studied play. Louise took no interest in the game—indeed hated all games of cards—and only played as a part of her duty in that house where she was the shadow of everybody else's sunshine.

They had played nearly an hour and a half when the elder woman threw down the cards with an impatient sigh, instead of dealing them.

"We have played long enough for to-night, Louise; I am tired of winning such miserable stakes. How ghastly the silence of this house is! Nothing but the tick, tick, tick of that clock on the mantelpiece, and the crackling of the logs now and then. You may get me a finger of fine champagne. I feel very low to-night. This house is killing me."

"You ought to be much easier in your mind now that your daughter has been placed in an honourable position—now that your conscience is at peace upon her account," said Louise, gravely.

"My conscience! Don't preach to me about conscience. I have done with all superstitious bugbears. I finished with them before I left Marseilles. I have never entered a church since my marriage. I was overdosed with religion in my girlhood. I married a clever man, who soon taught me to laugh at the old fables."

"And were you happier, do you think, for abandoning the old pathways?" asked Louise, gravely, arranging the cards, with her eyelids cast down, as if she hardly liked to meet her aunt's eyes while she spoke of sacred things.

"Happier! Happy—happier—happiest! Those are idle words,

child. I don't believe anybody is happy. I don't believe in the existence of happiness."

"Oh, you are wrong, aunt! There are moments, hours, days in this life perfectly and beautifully happy—days to which one looks back afterwards as to a dream of Heaven—days to which one looks forward after death, hoping that God will give us back that lost happiness in Heaven. Those brief days are balanced by long years of misery; but they have been—they have been. There is nobody on this earth who has not once been happy. The word is not an idle invention."

"Well, I suppose I was happy in my time—happy that Easter night when Jules Delmont followed me home from the church door, and talked to me, while my mother walked on ahead with my elder sister, your mother, little suspecting that I had an admirer making love to me under cover of the darkness. He was only clerk to an *avoué*, but those who knew anything about him said that he was one of the cleverest young men in Marseilles, and as my parents were only small shopkeepers they did not make many objections to my marrying him. We had only a couple of rooms to live in, and thirty francs a week to live upon; but it was all bright enough for the first year; and then—and then I found out things about my clever young husband. There was more money, but it wasn't come by very honestly; and we had to leave Marseilles one night in secret, never to go back there. We came to Paris, of course—everybody comes to Paris—and Dolores was born in a little street near St. Germain l'Auxerrois, where we struggled on somehow—till the end came for my husband, the bitter, cruel end. Are you ever going to get me that mouthful of cognac?"

"Yes, yes, aunt; but indeed you would be better without it."

"How dare you dictate to me! I am sick and faint with thinking of my wretched past. Get me some cognac this instant!"

Louise left the room and returned with a tiny carafe, and Titania's Venetian goblet. She did all she could to discourage her aunt's growing propensity for alcohol, but she was only a dependent. She might remonstrate, but she was compelled to obey.

"He was arrested at a low dancing place, among men and women of the vilest character—men who were like bad women, women who were like vicious men," pursued Madame Quijada, helping herself to the cognac with a tremulous hand.

"Why dwell upon those bygone troubles? I know all the sad story."

"It does me good to talk; anything is better than the silence of this ghastly room—white and gold—so white, so cold and cheerless, like a room meant for ghosts. It is a relief to talk of what I suffered in those days. He was arrested for swindling, forgery, a long series of frauds, and he was taken to prison. I never saw him alive again. He hanged himself at daybreak, within two hours of his arrest—hanged himself with a silk handkerchief upon the iron bar of the prison-grating, before he had been even examined by the *juge d'instruction*, and before his jailers thought it necessary to take any special precautions against suicide."

"You were much to be pitied, aunt," said Louise, quietly, putting away the neat little boxes of cards.

She had heard the story of her aunt's marriage very often of late, for Madame Quijada had grown more loquacious in proportion as she indulged in alcohol. She did not talk of these things to Dolores, who had been brought up in ignorance of her father's character, had, indeed, been brought up to believe that the departed parent was the scion of a noble Andalusian family, whereas the lawyer's clerk of Marseilles was the son of a pettifogging lawyer, and the name Quijada had been only adopted by Dolores' mother when she went to Madrid. She found the name in a volume of Cervantes which she opened at random.

"Oh, I have had a dreadful life, Louise. I have been surrounded by criminals," cried Madame Quijada, after two or three little glasses.

"Don't talk of it, aunt," repeated her niece, with a sudden vehemence. "You ought to be wiser than to talk to me of the past, knowing how much I have suffered—knowing that I shall never cease to suffer from that bitter memory, that the very presence of that man in the room stifles me. I cannot breathe when he is near me. I feel as if I must fall upon him and kill him, as he killed——"

"Hush, hush!" cried her aunt, looking apprehensively towards the door. "You are right. We ought never to talk of the past. It is dangerous, dangerous in every way. Heaven be praised, we have not heard of your brother for six months. We may never hear of him again."

"Ah, I always dread him most, after an interval of absence. He will reappear as he has reappeared before—or, if not, we shall read of some crime that has been committed in some foreign city, and we shall know that it is his work. He has neither heart nor

conscience. Can I ever forget, do you think, how he killed the man I idolized—the best and most generous of men? Can I ever forget how he used my name—name for evermore hateful to me—as a lure to draw that good, brave man to his death? And yet he dares to come into a room where I am—he dares to offer me his hand, red with the stain of murder."

"You have no right to fix that crime upon your brother!" Madame Quijada exclaimed angrily. "There is nothing to identify him with the murder, absolutely nothing. Your name might be used by any one. The unfortunate man may have talked about you, boasted of his conquest in the presence of his servants—of some French or Italian butler perhaps, who, being in the house, would know all his master's intended movements, and all about the money which was to change hands that day. Servants are often agents—conscious or unconscious—in crimes that mystify everybody. You have no right to associate your brother with that crime."

"I have the right of my own conviction. I know as well that it was his hand that struck the blow as if I had been standing by when the murder was done. I have no doubt about the murderer. What I want to find out is the identity of the murderer's accomplice—before God and man as guilty as the murderer himself. Who was the middle-aged woman who met Robert Hatrell in the street, and asked him to go to Antoinette Morel's deathbed? Who was the woman who used that lure? Who was the elderly Frenchwoman who changed the English bank-notes on the Riviera? Can you answer me those questions, aunt, you whose bread I have eaten—the bitter bread of dependence—and whose slave I have been, ever since my illness left me unable to grapple with the outside world? I have been afraid to live anywhere else—afraid to be among other people, lest in some moment of dark thought I should betray my brother. He is of my own blood, and I have sworn to myself never to give him up to justice."

"Give him up!" cried her aunt, contemptuously. "Why, you have not one shred of proof against him. There is nothing but your own brain-sick fancies to connect your brother with that Englishman's death. You are *toquée*, child, about Robert Hatrell. Your poor brain has never got over the fever that your sick fancies brought upon you; and one ought to be patient with you, and let you talk any nonsense you like. Luckily for your brother the police are not influenced by hysterical women. They want facts, hard

facts; and there is not one fact to connect your brother, Claude Leon Morel, with the crime in Denmark Street."

"Or you with the mysterious accomplice," said Louise. "Perhaps not. Yet if you were unconcerned in that foul crime, why did you both change your names within a month of the murder? Why was I made to change my name from Morel to Marcet, and to assume my second baptismal name in place of my first?"

"Your brother had made himself notorious during the Commune. He was not included in the amnesty; and he could not return to France in his own name. He was supposed to have been shot with the others at Satory. His resurrection would have been dangerous."

"Say that the false name meant nothing; but how do you account for the sudden change from poverty to wealth? You and I were living in an attic in a wretched dirty street in one of the shabbiest, dreariest quarters of that great wilderness of brick where we had taken refuge after the troubles here. One day, you disappeared without telling me where you were going, leaving me just a line to say you were going away upon business and might be absent for some time. You left me penniless, except for the pittance I was able to earn by working for a Jewish tailoring house—cruel work, which wore my fingers to the bone. You had been gone a week when I heard some women in the court where I lived talking of a murder. I could just understand enough English then to know what they were talking about, but I listened heedlessly enough until I heard the name of Hatrell—not pronounced as I pronounced it, yet a great horror came over me at the thought that it might be the same name. It was not he who was murdered, I told myself; I was an idiot to be so disturbed by fear. And yet I could not command myself or keep calm while I questioned the women. They couldn't tell me who the murdered man was—only that his name was Hatrell. They said if I wanted to know more I had better buy a newspaper. I rushed out into the street like a mad woman, and it seemed to me as if I should never find a shop where they sold newspapers, though there were hundreds of shops in the long busy street. At last I found a tobacconist's where there were a lot of papers stuck in a rack against the doorway. I took three of them, haphazard, and gave the shopkeeper the last threepence I had in the world—the pence that were to have bought food for the day. I hurried back to my garret as fast as my feet would carry me. I thought more than once that I should fall down in the street, for my knees seemed to give way under me. I would not

trust myself to look at the papers till I was safe in my own hole, like a wounded animal; and then I bolted my door and sat down upon the bare boards and unfolded one of the newspapers."

"Why go over all this old ground, Louise? A little while ago you reproached me for dwelling on the past; and now you are harping upon old sores. You have told me the story often enough."

Louise had begun to pace the room in an agitated manner as she talked, while Madame Quijada sank deeper into her luxurious arm-chair, and sat there looking up at her niece with an awe-stricken countenance, as if she had been Nemesis. Time was when she would have put down all such speech as this with a high hand; but the growing habit of brandy and chloral had weakened her energies. She who once held so firm a mastery over daughter and niece was now powerless to control either.

"I will talk of these things. You have kept me long enough in miserable silence and submission. I have been your drudge—not because I feared you, or valued the home you have given me—but because I care nothing for my life, and would as soon be a slave as an empress. But there are times when the memory of the past is too strong for me. I want you to know what I suffered while I was alone in that garret. The room comes back to me in my dreams sometimes with a hideous reality, and I fancy I am sitting there in the hot summer afternoon, stitching, stitching in hopeless monotony, as if I were a human machine. I *must* talk of that hideous past. It is in my mind always; it is a part of me."

She walked to and fro in silence for a few minutes, and then went on recalling her misery, step by step.

"The first newspaper that I opened was full of the Denmark Street murder—and the Denmark Street murder was the murder of Robert Hatrell. I could read English much better than I could speak it, and there was not one word of the witnesses that escaped me. I saw my own name, and understood that it was the name of his poor Antoinette which had lured him to the shambles in which he was to be killed. And then I knew that the murderer was my brother—my brother, whose face I had not seen since the first few weeks after we came to London. I knew that the pretended watch-maker in Denmark Street was my brother, and that the woman who asked Robert Hatrell to go to the deathbed of a girl called Antoinette must be you, and only you. And I knew that because Robert Hatrell had once been kind to me, and loved me a little, perhaps, in spite of the difference in our stations, because of those

few happy days of my girlhood, he had been trapped and murdered. It was not till afterwards that I read about the changing of the notes on the Riviera; but, when I did, I knew that the grey-haired Frenchwoman was you. I knew your shifty tricks well enough in the past to know that you would have no difficulty in disguising yourself and aping the manners of a woman of quality. That was months afterwards, when I was able to leave the French Hospital, where I was carried raving mad with brain-fever after starving in my garret for nearly a week, trying to work from daybreak till dark, and spending sleepless nights of agony. But for the refuge that blessed institution afforded me I must have died of hunger in my garret, or been turned out of doors to die in the street. My landlord was a cabdriver, and he had the humanity to put me into his cab, burnt up with fever and delirious as I was, and drive me to the hospital, where he told them my story."

"I sent you money as soon as I had settled at Madrid, where I went in the hope of getting help from an old friend."

"Yes, your letter telling me to go to Madrid and enclosing the money for the journey arrived after I had gone to the hospital. The letter was given me when I recovered my senses, and when I was able to travel I set out for Spain. In Madrid I found you established in very different quarters to our garret in the Minories. Your old friend had been very generous to you. You who had been nearly starving in London were able to make a very good figure in Madrid, able to send your daughter to a convent-school, you who were living on bread and water before Robert Hatrell was murdered. Do you suppose I ever doubted where your money came from? I knew from the beginning that it was the price of blood. You called me mad when I refused to eat or drink with you while your prosperity lasted. You laughed at me because I preferred a crust of bread in my garret to your dainty fare. When your money was gone and you were again reduced to poverty my mind was easier; I could better bear to live with you; and then I grew fond of Dolores—she at least was innocent of all evil—and so I learned to bear the burden of my life."

"You are a fool," muttered Madame Quijada, hastily. "I have heard all this rodomontade of yours so often that I never think it worth my while to argue with you. Just give me your arm to help me to my room, before Dolores and her husband come home from the theatre. These rheumatic knees of mine will hardly carry me upstairs without assistance. You are a fool, Louise. You

might be a milliner's drudge, toiling among a lot of other drudges at this day, if it were not for your cousin Dolores and me."

"I might have been lying at the bottom of the Seine long ago, if it were not for Dolores," answered Louise, gloomily. "Her love has been the only bond that held me to life."

CHAPTER XXV.

DAISY'S DIARY IN JOY.

I AM engaged to Gilbert Florestan. At last I understand what it is to be an engaged girl; and henceforward I shall be able to sympathize with every engaged girl in this world, of whatever nation, of whatever colour, whether she wears ostrich feathers and diamonds in her head at the Court of St. James's, or dances in a feather-girdle on some unknown islet of the South Seas; whether she spends her allowance on frocks or on beads. Yes, till I am ninety, till I am cold in death, I shall be able to sympathize with every lover and every loved one upon earth: for now I know what love means. I know that it means EVERYTHING.

It means the colour of the sky, and the brightness of the sun; it means the perfume of flowers and the freshness of morning: it means the balmy noontide; and it means the restful coolness of green waving boughs: it means lamplight at eventide in cosy, gracious drawing-rooms: it means blind-man's holiday beside the morning-room fire! It means all these; for all these have double beauty, and charm, and comfort, and sweetness since Gilbert and I were engaged.

WHAT will Cyril think, down at the bottom of this round globe, when he hears that Gilbert and I are to be married on the first day of the new year? What can he think, except that I am the lightest and most trumpery young woman he ever had the misfortune to count among his acquaintance?

Beatrice Reardon has been very nice to me. She says that I have nothing to be ashamed about in the transaction. It is customary. It is, one may say, a rule of the game. When people break off an engagement, even if they have been engaged for years, and have doted on each other all the time, it is the duty of each to get engaged to somebody else without the slightest loss of time. They

owe this to their own dignity. A girl who has the slightest self-respect will get engaged within a week after the parting, even if she has to marry a chimney-sweep.

"Of course," said I. "That is what Claire does in the 'Iron-master,' and every one knows what a perfect heroine she was."

"If you can just tolerate Mr. Florestan, you may consider yourself very lucky," said Beatrice. "When I heard you were going to marry him, I made up my mind that he was absolutely loathsome to you."

"Did you?" cried I. "Curious, isn't it? I really can just submit to the idea of my future existence as his wife. I shall live next door to mother, and that will be some consolation."

I meant to write everything in this diary. It was to be my novel, the romance of my life, with all its bright colours and all its dark shadows. It was to be a book to whose pages I could go back when I am middle-aged and when I am old, and live again all the happiest hours of my youth, and awaken echoes of old voices and vivid smiles, and every thought, feeling, and fancy of the passing hour. The wheels of the chariot roll on so swiftly when one is happy. One should try at least to put a break upon memory; and for that there is only one way—pen and ink.

Yes, I meant the story of my life to be complete; and yet I am going to leave one little blank. A little blank, did I say?—a blank which represents the crisis of my existence, the turning point between dull patience and consummate bliss.

I cannot write the mood and manner of my engagement, that sudden passage from liberty to bondage, when he took me in his arms, in the arbour where we were once so miserable, and called me "wife." Wife! As if we were married already! Absurd, no doubt, to the indifferent reader, but the word thrilled my heart.

I cannot write of his kisses, or reckon them as if they were pounds, shillings, and pence in the housekeeper's book. I cannot write all the sweet foolishness of his talk, the undeserved praises, the intoxicating flatteries, which he protested were not flatteries. Of those ridiculous moments I can keep no record. Perhaps if I had been let in at the gate of Paradise for half an hour I should not be able to describe the heavenly garden when I came out again. It is the same with that half-hour in the arbour. He talked, and I listened, and we were engaged. That is my only record.

On the same evening, however, we had a very serious conversa-

tion on the terrace after dinner. Mother was in her favourite seat by the drawing-room window. Uncle Ambrose was pacing the room. We could see them both in the lamplight as we walked slowly up and down. The evening was wonderfully warm and balmy for the end of September, and the great full moon was rising behind Lamford Church tower; this being the third moon we have worn out since we left London.

We talked of the moon a little, and he quoted Shelley, whom he knows as well as if he had competed for one of Mrs. Crawshay's prizes; and then I ventured to ask him a question which had been burning my tongue ever since we were engaged, just four hours and a half. It is wonderful what those four hours had done for me. I felt as much at my ease with him as if we had been engaged for three weeks; and I began to understand the cool audacity of girls who send their fiancés on messages and make light of them in company, and the free and easy manners of the motherly girls who mend their sweethearts' gloves, and scold them for spilling things on their waistcoats, and put diachylon-plaster on their wounds.

"Will you be very angry if I ask you a question?" I asked.

"I should be angry if you wished to ask me anything and didn't," said he. "'Being your slave, what should I do——'"

"Please don't," I cried. "Cyril quoted that sonnet once, and I was quite rude to him about it. I shouldn't like you to quote anything second-hand. Yet it is a lovely sonnet, isn't it?" I added apologetically, for the line sounded sweet from *him*. "Cyril was not in touch with my ideas about Shakespeare."

He laughed, and answered with a most unnecessary kiss.

"You really wouldn't mind?" I asked.

"From those lips all words are dear."

"Were you ever in love with anybody before you began to care for me?"

"Ah, I thought that question would come. Shall I answer it Jesuitically or honestly?"

"Oh, honestly, please; be brutal to me rather than dishonest. Of course I am prepared for the worst. You must have adored ever so many girls before you happened to let your glances light upon insignificant me."

"Ever so many. That's a large order. Suppose I plead guilty to two. I wish I had never looked at a woman, or at least never wasted a thought upon one till I saw you. I shouldn't, if I had only known what was coming."

"Do you really think I am as nice as the other two?" I asked, comforted by those sweet words.

"I think you are to them as a wild rose on a hedge in the dewy morning compared with a double dahlia in the heat and dust and glare of a tent at a flower show. You are as the freshness of the morning, and they smelt of gas. The first could not help that, poor soul, for it was across the footlights my heart went out to her."

"Was she very pretty?" I asked.

"She was very pretty. That was just fifteen years ago, mark you, when I was at Eton. She is very pretty at this present hour; she will go on being very pretty, I hope, till the end of the century. She is a burlesque actress, and I saw her in the daintiest little villager's dress you can conceive, dancing as lightly as a real fairy, and not a stage one. Yes, Daisy," he said gravely, "I plead guilty to being over head and ears in love with Miss Millicent Melville, of the Hilarity, fifteen years ago, for the whole space of the Christmas holidays. I was stone-broke for her sake, and spent all my tips upon theatre tickets, hothouse flowers, and chocolate caramels. I delivered the flowers and the caramels to the surly stage doorkeeper, who may have sold them to the minor members of the troupe for aught I know. I never got speech of my houri; and I was heart-broken when I discovered, upon unimpeachable authority, that she had a husband and five children. How she did it—how she looked so lovely and sylphlike and childishly innocent, with an eating and drinking, smoking and swearing man and five brats to work for I have never been able to understand."

"Was she number one?" I asked.

"Yes, she was number one."

"In that case I forgive you your first love. And now tell me about your second."

"That is a graver case, Daisy. I cannot make light of that infatuation. Cupid did not assail me with paper pellets that time. His arrows were barbed, and the barbs were poisoned. I loved a woman who was unworthy of my love, Daisy. I passed through the scathing fire of a wasted passion——"

"You loved her as well as you love me?" I asked, feeling just as if I had dropped from a paradise in yonder moon down to a hard, cruel earth.

All my gladness perished in one gasping sigh. I felt sure he had cared more for her than for me.

"I'm afraid I must plead guilty to having loved her very dearly

while my love lasted, Daisy; but the cure was a clean cure. There was not so much as a scar left from the old wound by the time I met you in Paris; and from that hour I was yours and yours only."

"And if I had not broken with Cyril, what would you have done?"

"Dragged on my roaming, desultory life, and suffered the dull agony of an empty heart."

"Were you really unhappy in Scotland, in spite of grouse and salmon?"

"In spite of as fine a stag as was ever stalked, which this hand slew the day before I casually heard that Arden had sailed in the big new steamer for Colombo."

"And would you not have found some new divinity before Christmas?"

It was delightful to have him there and to be able to catechise him: yet I could not help being savagely jealous of that unknown love, the number two in his calendar.

I could not but feel that it was nice of him to tell me the truth, even at the risk of offending me for life.

"Tell me about that second flame of yours," I said, agonized with curiosity. "Was she very lovely?"

"She was splendidly handsome—a woman whose diamonds seemed more brilliant than those of other women, because they so harmonized with her bright beauty. I was among many worshippers, and I happened to be the most eligible of her adorers from a matrimonial point of view, and so she was gracious to me, and so I was her slave——"

"Did she jilt you?" I asked, for there was a bitterness in his tone which assured me the dear creature had treated him abominably.

I could have hugged her for it.

"Well, it was hardly a case of jilting. If I were to write my story I should call the book 'Illusion and Disillusion.' I was fortunate enough to find her out—before marriage instead of afterwards. My innocent little Daisy can hardly guess what a world of misery that discovery saved me."

"I don't want to guess," I said; "but there is one thing I should like to know, Gilbert."

I blushed in the moonlight, and trembled at my own audacity as I pronounced his Christian name.

I had my arm through his, and found myself giving his arm a gentle squeeze now and then, just to make sure that he was real, and that all the ecstasy of this hour was not a moonlit dream.

"Ask as many questions as you like, fair Fatima. There is no blue chamber in my memory of which you may not open the door."

"It does not pain you to speak of that wicked person?"

"Not a whit. No more than it would pain me to talk of Cleopatra."

"But at the time of your disillusion—did love die all at once, or by inches?"

"Love died in an hour; but there was something, the memory and after-taste of passion, which was plaguily long a-dying."

"Is it dead yet?" I asked, frightened.

"Dead as a doornail. Dead as Scrooge's partner, old Marley; deader, for no ghost of that vanished feeling will ever haunt me. I was heart-whole the night I met you at the Grand Opera, and from that night I was your slave."

"Oh, that is nonsense!" cried I; "you could not have cared for me all at once, a commonplace English person like me. What was there in my poor face to catch your eye?"

"Innocence, truth, candour. The virtues which make man's life happy and honourable. I saw poetic loveliness, and through that transparent beauty I saw the true and pure heart of girlhood, a heart of virgin-gold, flawless, above price."

"Don't, don't!" I cried, standing on tiptoe to put my hand upon his lips. "This last illusion is worse than the first and second. How can I ever live up to such an ideal as you have made out of me?"

"Only love me, Daisy; there is no more to do."

"Oh, that comes too easy. I did that before I was asked."

Mother's voice calling us from the open window put an end to our confidential talk, but my heart was quite at ease now that I knew the history of his earlier loves. If he had told me he had never been in love before he saw me I should not have believed him; and I should have been tortured for all the years to come by inextinguishable distrust.

All this happened nearly a month ago, though I couldn't bring myself to write about it before to-day; and perhaps I should not be writing now if Gilbert had not been obliged to go to London to see his solicitor—our first parting—leaving me to get through the day somehow without him. The grounds look so dreary, the shrubberies seem so empty—and oh! what ages to eight-o'clock dinner, when he will be back.

CHAPTER XXVI.

DAISY'S DIARY IN SORROW

When I wrote the last line in this book, I think I must have been the happiest girl in the world. There was hardly a cloud upon my sky—yes, one cloud, the fact that the man whom I thought my friend and benefactor was out of health and unhappy. Yet, in spite of that one cloud I was utterly happy, selfishly absorbed in my new happiness.

To-day I take up my pen in fear and trembling. A dark and terrible cloud has closed over my life.

I thank God that cloud does not rest upon my lover's head. He stands out in the sunshine, and all my thoughts of him are full of thankfulness and delight; but I can no longer be the selfish, self-absorbed creature I was when I wrote those last foolish pages, giving myself up to this dumb confidant as I could do to no living being. I must think of others now. This dark discovery forces my thoughts into other grooves. I must remember that I am my mother's daughter, as well as Gilbert's affianced wife.

Oh, it is all so sad, so awful, such a cruel revelation, changing the whole colour of life, stripping off the mask from a face that was once honoured and beloved, opening a deep well of baseness and iniquity in the flowery garden-world where I was so happy! To me it was as startling and sudden and blighting to come face to face with that great wickedness as it would have been to Eve in Eden, if the ground had opened at her feet and showed her a charnel house, there in that fair world where she had never heard of death.

Sometimes, for a few moments, I doubt, and ask myself if I am not deluded; if that hideous suspicion which grew in an hour into absolute conviction might not after all be groundless; and then I go over the facts slowly, in cold blood, one by one, carefully putting them together again, like the pieces in a puzzle, and there the awful fact appears in unmistakable certainty.

Oh, father, father, how that trusting open nature, that generous heart of yours was cheated! How coldly, deliberately, and heartlessly your life was plotted away by the man who sat at your table,

and smiled beside your hearth, and was to you almost as a brother! It was your own familiar friend who planned your murder.

I must go back to the moment when this hideous secret revealed itself. It was natural that as Gilbert's fiancée I should tell him everything that had happened to me in all my life; and, indeed, I fear that I must have bored him sadly since we were engaged by prattling to him about every detail of my insignificant existence—my lessons, my boat, my playfellows and friends. I don't believe I have spared him a single doll, certainly not a favourite doll, nor a single nursery anecdote, nor a single family joke. He has been told everything.

Two days ago he came into the drawing-room just as it was growing dusk. He had been to London again, and we had had another parting, and I had felt very mopy all the afternoon, more especially as mother had gone off on her weekly round, to hear her weekly tale of woes and illnesses. I did not expect to see Gilbert until dinner-time; and oh, how my foolish heart thrilled with delight when I heard his step in the hall just after the clock struck five!

It is not very often that I have the privilege of making tea for Gilbert, and on this occasion I am sorry to say I made it so strong that it was hardly drinkable. I saw he made a wry face at every sip—though he declared it was quite the nicest tea he had ever tasted—and even chivalry did not enable him to empty his cup.

"Was it Metternich or some other great diplomat who sipped a glass of castor oil with every sign of relish because his host had offered it to him as particularly fine Tokay?" I asked him, laughing at his self-sacrifice; and then I rang and ordered some chocolate à la vanille, which our butler makes to perfection. "You poor victim of soft-heartedness," I said, "why didn't you tell me that the tea was horrid? I over-reached myself in my endeavour to make it especially good, so that you might have a high opinion of my domestic capabilities."

"I like strong tea," he answered, "but certainly yours is *fortissimo*. I fancy a good-sized pot of such stuff would serve to blow up the Houses of Parliament."

How gay we were, as we sat and talked and laughed in the growing dusk, with our feet on the marble curb, crooning over the fire like John Anderson and his old wife! How proud I felt of my lover, and how blissful in the assurance that he was all my own, that I had left no corner of his heart unexplored, no secret hidden from my prying eyes!

We sipped our chocolate, which was really delicious. What superior creatures servants are! If I had attempted to make that Menier à la vanille I have no doubt the result would have been "ojous," as dear Mr. Toole says in "The Upper Crust." We sipped our chocolate, and talked and talked, not from grave to gay, but from gay to grave; and presently I told my dearest the single secret of my life, the one act of mine which I had hidden from the best of mothers.

I told him how, when I first went to London, I was haunted by the ghastly vision of my father's murder, and how a morbid longing to see the room where that dark deed was done took possession of my mind, and would not be driven away.

I told him how I crept out of the house in the summer twilight, and described every step in that dismal pilgrimage till I came to Church Street, on my way home. And then I told him of that intolerable Frenchman's insolence, and of the good creature in the hansom, to whom I should *so* like to leave a legacy when I am old enough to make a will, if I only knew his honourable name.

"I know my enemy's name well enough," said I, "for, as the cab was driving off with me, his friends called out to him, 'Holà, Duverdier.'"

"Duverdier!" cried Gilbert, starting as if he had been shot. "Great God in Heaven! Why, that is the name of the man I believe to be your father's murderer!"

In the next instant he seemed to regret having spoken, but I would not let him take back his words. I made him tell me all he knew or thought or suspected about my father's cruel death; and stage by stage I got the whole story out of him. It was slow work, for he was sorely disinclined to tell me anything.

"Now that I know something I must know all," I said, when he refused to answer my questions; and so, little by little, I heard the whole story.

My mother had asked him to help her in tracing out a girl whom my father admired and had half a mind to marry before he had ever seen mother's face. She appealed to Gilbert, counting on his knowledge of Parisian life, and he had succeeded beyond his hopes up to a certain stage; but just as he had put his hand, as it were, upon the brother of this Frenchwoman, whom he believed to be the so-called watchmaker in Denmark Street, the man left Paris, leaving no clue to his destination.

"I could do no more than leave the case in the hands of the

Parisian police, who have a strong motive for finding your father's murderer, if he is above ground," said Gilbert. "Of course my reasons for believing this to be the man are in a measure conjectural, but the circumstantial evidence is strong. The man who murdered your father was a man who knew the story of your father's youthful love affair, and was able to use the French milliner's name as a decoy. It is known that Morel was in London with other Communists at the time of the murder; it is known that he was heard of at Madrid soon after the murder, and that he was then flush of money. For my own satisfaction, I have convincing proof that this Duverdier is the man Claude Morel, but it is not such proof as could be produced in a court of justice. The evidence that convinced me was the evidence of a woman's face."

And then he told me how he had met Morel's sister, and had taxed her with her identity with the girl whom my father once loved. Her emotion at the sound of my father's name was pitiable; her agitation when he accused her brother of the murder was terrible. After that interview he had no doubt as to the guilt of the man now known as Leon Duverdier.

"The one missing link in the chain of evidence is the means by which the knowledge of your father's movements on that fatal day was transmitted to the murderer. He must have had an informant, if not an accomplice, either in the immediate vicinity of this house, or in the lawyer's office, where the hour and the nature of his appointment may have been known to the clerks."

A deadly chill crept through my veins as he said these words. I was glad of the growing darkness which hid my face from him. I was glad that I had deferred the lighting of the lamps, so as to prolong our blind-man's holiday. I sat silent, motionless, paralyzed by the horrible suspicion which filled my mind.

Some one at Lamford must have given the information that enabled the murderer to plan his crime. Who could that some one be unless it were the familiar friend, the confidant of every enterprise and every idea of my father and mother? My mother has told me in answer to my questions that no servant in the house knew where my father was going or what he was going to do that day. The conversation at dinner on the previous evening had not touched on the business part of the transaction. My father had been full of the landscape-gardener's plans, and the talk had been wholly of the terraces and the arboretum, of levelling and planting, and laying on water for fountains and greenhouses. All that was

known in the household on that evening or on the following morning was that my father was going to London, and was to return before dinner. Yet some one had furnished such precise information that my father's murderer was able to meet him midway between the bank and the lawyer's office. Who was that accomplice, or worse than accomplice, of the murderer—since the idea of murder might never have entered Claude Morel's mind if some one, knowing my father's affairs, had not told him how large a sum of money might be gained by that crime?

Who could that secret assassin, that worse than murderer, be but the man whose footsteps were now dogged by the shedder of blood?—who, but that man whose face bore in every line the marks of an unextinguishable remorse, the man whom I had seen shrinking away with horror-stricken countenance from the room where my father used to sit, and where his guilty conscience may have conjured up the shadow of the dead?

His friend, his generous, confiding friend! Oh God, what a depth of iniquity! To have deliberately planned that cruel murder, to have plotted the crime which a vulgar assassin was to execute, to have waited and watched for the opportunity, perhaps to have tempted and persuaded the assassin, against some remnant of better feeling, some instinctive shrinking from bloodshed, some scruple of conscience! And to have been with us, day by day, after that devilish act, our friend, our consoler; till at last, trading on a woman's gratitude for fancied benefits, he put forward his claim to the wife of his victim, and possessed himself of the object of his wicked love!

Possessed himself! Yes, thank God, I know that my mother never loved him, that she gave her life up to him as if in payment of a debt, sacrificing herself to reward the fidelity of a lifelong friendship.

God keep her from the horror of knowing what I know!

My long silence made Gilbert uneasy about me, and he was full of tender sympathy, thinking that our conversation about my father had renewed an old grief. Mother came in while he was consoling me, and the lamps were brought, and I had to put on a cheerful countenance somehow for her dear sake; and by-and-by I had to sit down to dinner with that Judas, and still to play the hypocrite. I could hear the sound of my own voice as I talked, and it had such a false tone that it jarred upon my ear.

Oh, the horror of that hour in the drawing-room, when mother asked me to play some of those quaint old variations she and I are so fond of, and when I sat before the piano and played like a machine, while Ambrose Arden walked up and down, with soft, catlike step, and now and again paused and stood behind me for a few minutes, and once even laid his hand upon my shuddering shoulder. My whole being was one sense of horror and revulsion. I could scarcely breathe while he was so near me; yet I went on playing somehow, always like a machine. Poor Mozart!

"You are not in your usual form to-night, Daisy," said Gilbert, who pretends to think a great deal of my playing.

And then he came over to me, and bent down to look into my eyes, and talked to me ever so sweetly, and his dear presence exorcised the demon, and that guilty wretch walked slowly away, and went on with his restless prowling, to and fro, to and fro, like a spirit in hell—the hell of guilty memories and gnawing thoughts, the hell of the traitor and murderer, that hell within the soul of man which made Judas hurl back his fatal thirty pieces upon his tempters, and rush out into the field and destroy himself.

Where their worm dieth not and their fire is not quenched.

That is the hell which Ambrose Arden has made for himself.

I went on playing while Gilbert went back to the other end of the room where he had been sitting with mother, and challenged her to a game at chess. I was alone in the shadowy corner by the piano, and as I played I watched that tall, slim figure, with the bent shoulders, moving slowly to and fro, with a gliding motion.

Since this awful truth has revealed itself, I seem to see Ambrose Arden in a new light—as if I had been blindfold before, and had made for myself an image of the man, and coloured it with my own colours. The face and figure I watched to-night are new and strange, and the signs of a guilty conscience, the indications of a crafty and double nature seem to me now so strongly impressed upon every look and movement of the man that I tell myself I *must* have been blind all this time, or I could not have missed his secret. It is there, written upon his brow, the very brand that seared the forehead of the first murderer, Cain.

What a relief it was to be alone at last! yes, even a relief to bid good night to Gilbert and mother, and to lock the door of my own room, and to sit down by the fire, face to face with the grim and

hideous truth. I wanted to think out my horrible idea, to arrange all the facts which seem to constitute such damning evidence against my step-father, to try if I could not acquit him, or, at any rate, write "not proven" against his crime.

Alas, no! After long hours of thought, after a long winter night without one interval of blessed sleep, my reason still condemns him. In my mother's second husband, in the friend and teacher of all my early years, the man to whom I owed so much—in him whom last of all men I should have suspected, I still see the murderer of my father.

I recalled Duverdier's appearance in Grosvenor Square, his persistence in seeing my step-father, his look of baffled fury as he left the house. I recalled his appearance in this place. Would any man without credentials of a guilty nature dare so to haunt a man in my step-father's position?

Yet this mere fact of the man's persecution would not influence me to believe in my step-father's guilt. The evidence that is to my mind conclusive is the evidence of Cyril's appearance and Cyril's conduct upon the day when he played the listener to a conversation between his father and Duverdier. I saw those three figures in the lane: Ambrose Arden and Duverdier side by side, Duverdier talking angrily, vehemently, though in a lowered voice, and that other figure following stealthily, listening with bent brow and pallid face.

Was it like my frank and manly Cyril to play the spy upon his father's movements, to creep at his father's heels and listen to a confidential conversation? What could be more unlike his character, as I have known it? Nothing but the most stringent circumstances would have forced him into such a contemptible position.

And within two or three hours of that scene in the lane he came to me, changed and aged as if by a mortal malady, and told me that all was over between us. I remember almost every word of our conversation, his protest that the motive of his renunciation was one which I could never know, his resolution to go to the uttermost end of the earth, to begin a new life, to cut himself adrift from all old associations. And this determination, this abandonment of the whole scheme of his existence, had been resolved upon since he left the Rectory, in high spirits, the most light-hearted of men. What but some awful revelation could so quickly change the whole colour of his life?

This is the evidence that weighs most heavily with me; and next to this is the evidence of my step-father's decay, the gradual

deepening of the gloom that has darkened over him in the midst of the happiest and fairest surroundings.

No, I have no doubt now as to the brain which plotted the murder, or the hand which sent the information to the murderer on the eve, or on the morning, of the fatal day.

And my mother is this man's wife, and must never know his guilt, lest the horror of it should drive her mad. When I think of her abiding love for my father, and think how she gave herself to this Judas, not caring for him, I am almost mad myself.

Oh, what a cheat and trickster, what a prince of villains he has been, to play so patient a part, to sow the wicked seed at the first chance Fate gave him, and then to wait seven years for the harvest! Had he asked my mother to be his wife within a year or two of the murder, her eyes might have been opened, she might have suspected that he had some part in her husband's death. But after seven years of tranquil, self-abnegating friendship, after winding himself into our hearts by every artifice of an accomplished hypocrite, it seemed almost a natural, inevitable development that he should change from friend to lover, and that his constancy in friendship should claim its reward.

No, the dear mother must never know this hideous secret, if any power of self-repression on my part can keep it from her. And so I have day after day to sit at table with the man who planned my father's death; and I have to repress all signs of repulsion, and to seem all that I once was to him, at least in my mother's presence.

Happily for me he spends the greater part of his existence in the solitude of the cottage over the way; happily for all of us that existence is not likely to be a long one. Our Lamford doctor, who went up to London with mother and her husband to assist at the visit to the physician, told Gilbert in confidence that there is organic disease of the heart, and that Ambrose Arden is not likely to live to old age.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE AMIABLE MAGICIAN.

ELDERLY men, when they are in love, are the weakest of mortals, and weakness is prone to compromises. In his conduct towards his beautiful young wife, Pedro Perez showed all the weakness of an elderly lover. He halted between two opinions. He wanted to keep his treasure secluded from the world, secure from the pursuit of Parisian treasure-seekers, and yet he wanted to flaunt his happiness before the eyes of those half-dozen or so of competitors and rivals with whom he had ridden neck and neck in the *chasse aux millions* —the great race for wealth which is the favourite sport of this nineteenth century, whether the course over which it is run be the Stock Exchange or the gaming-saloon, the silver mine or the manure heap. For Pedro Perez the world meant one particular group of men at his club, one particular corner at his restaurant, and all his ideas of society were limited to that narrow circle of men who had begun life with a five-franc piece and were ending it with four or five millions sterling. To these few intimates Perez had boasted of his wife's beauty, and of the villa in which he had enshrined his idol, as it were in a temple of silver and gold; and these on more than one occasion had expressed their desire to be admitted within the veil of the temple and to behold the goddess.

Perez coquetted with the situation. He declared that his young wife was of too retiring and modest a nature to endure the gaze of strangers; he compared her to the violet shrinking within the shelter of its leaves; but his friends were not to be put off so easily.

"There never was a woman yet who did not like to be admired," said Joffroy, the famous contractor, who, like Perez, had made his fortune in Spanish America, but in another line of business; "and if your wife is a clever woman she will like to make the acquaintance of men of the world, like Hausroth yonder and myself. I have heard of your wife when she was only Mademoiselle Quijada, living in retirement with her mother. A starveling pianoforte player who teaches my daughters was loud in his praises of the young lady. I can understand your not caring to introduce your friends to her while she was Mademoiselle Quijada, when you might have run the

risk of losing her; but now that she is your wife it is a miserly thing to keep your friends on the outside of your door, and I'll be bound the lady resents her seclusion."

Perez could not bring himself to deny the charge. He argued with himself that there could be no danger in allowing Dolores to receive old fogies like Joffroy and Hausroth, than whom Paris could hardly furnish two less attractive men; the former, oily of complexion and obese of figure, with greasy iron-grey hair and a bottle nose; the latter, lean and lantern-jawed, with foxy hair and beard, and the features of a modern Shylock. The men who begin life with five francs and die worth five millions sterling have very little leisure to sacrifice to the graces. Life with them means to eat and drink and calculate, to invest and reinvest, to watch the money-market with an unwavering vigilance, and to concentrate all the forces of mind and body upon one great aim.

No, there would be no risk in tantalizing these old comrades of the Bourse with a glimpse of his elegant domicile and his lovely and amiable wife; and in conceding thus much he would conciliate Dolores and her mother. He had refused to give a ball; he might compromise the matter by an occasional dinner-party—a small snug dinner, at which only wealth and mature years should be represented.

"I have not many friends, Dolores," he said to his wife that evening, as she sat yawning on a low ottoman in front of the wood fire, while he smoked his after-dinner cigarette, "but the few I have are devoted to me, and they are dying to know you. I don't care about giving a dance, as I told you the other day. I don't want to see my house turned out of windows to please a crowd of young fools whose only claim to notice is that they can imitate a tee-totum; but I've no objection to giving a dinner now and then, if you like."

Dolores stifled a yawn before she answered. She had been looking at the burning logs in a waking dream, and this suggestion of a dinner-party did not arouse any enthusiasm in her.

"The people you know are so dreadful," she said. "You have pointed out men in the Bois as your dearest friends, whose appearance positively made me shudder. A long lantern-jawed man with red hair, and a threadbare overcoat, for instance."

"Hausroth," murmured Perez, recognizing the picture; "a man only second in importance to the Rothschilds and the Mires."

"And a bloated creature, with a complexion that suggests nothing but the refuse of the oil-mills."

"Joffroy."

"And a little wizened wretch, with one shoulder higher than the other, and long greasy hair of a greenish grey."

"Struoski," said Perez, "a Pole by birth, and the keenest financier in Paris. Do you know, Dolores, the amount of solid capital which those three men represent?"

"I neither know nor care. All I hope is that they will never cross my threshold; unless, indeed, you allow me to get together so many artistic and agreeable people that I shall hardly be conscious of your capitalists."

"Where are you to get your agreeable people?" asked Perez, after a pause of discomfiture, vexed that his compromise found so little favour with his idol.

"Oh, I will find them easily enough, if you only give me leave to send out a few invitations. Duturque knows lots of clever people, and he can send out my cards: 'Monsieur and Madame Perez invite Monsieur or Madame Chose to spend the evening with them'—with 'Monsieur Duturque's compliments' at the corner of the card."

"But have you ever met these people in Madame Duturque's salon—a third floor in the Rue des Saints Pères?" inquired Perez, incredulously.

"Certainly not. They would not go to a floor in the Rue des Saints Pères. They would not go anywhere to be entertained with Duturque's music and Madame Duturque's weak tea; but they will come to my villa; they will come to the wife of Perez Peru. Voyons, mon ami, let us make a compromise——"

Perez sighed. It was his own word.

"You shall invite those dreadful-looking human ingots of yours to dinner, a dinner of all that is most precious in the way of gormandize; and after dinner, I, Madame Perez, will be at home to all that is most distinguished in the art world: the painters and sculptors; the actors and actresses; the journalists——"

"Who will write about your party in their accursed papers, and who will ridicule your husband?"

"Why should they ridicule you? Is it ridiculous to have married youth and good looks instead of age and ugliness? I can't understand, Pedro, why you are so ashamed of your wife."

She lighted a cigarette for him as she talked, seating herself caressingly upon the arm of his chair, and transferring the cigarette delicately from her lips to his. She knew that he was yielding, and that a caress and a few sweet words would clench the bargain.

"Ashamed of my wife! no, it is of the contrast between wife

and husband I am ashamed. It is that which the newspaper men will ridicule."

"They will be too wise to offend so powerful a man as Percz Peru."

"Ah, but they have lampooned me; they have seized every occasion to hold me up to ridicule."

"Simply because you live in your shell like a snail. You are of no use to the clever people of Paris. You fulfil none of the duties of a millionaire. You will be a few thousands richer when you die, but you will have offended everybody while you live. Give me *carte blanche*, Pedro, and you shall have all the comic journalists and caricaturists at your feet. There shall be no dancing, there shall be no foolish young men; but I will give a party that will dazzle Paris."

He did not yield without a struggle. He smoked a third and a fourth cigarette of his wife's lighting. Her gentleness, her graceful coquetries made him forget every resolution he had ever made to live his own life and to keep the tinsel and folly of the pleasure-loving world outside his gate. He yielded after the fourth cigarette, as Ahasuerus might have yielded to Esther, when Esther was still the latest novelty in the Royal harem.

"Do what you like, ma chérie. Invite whom you please," he murmured at last.

The cards of invitation went out two days after that discussion. The list of names was written with the aid of the good Duturque, whose professional career had brought him into communication with the art-world of Paris, though it had not elevated him to intimacy with celebrities. Dolores trusted much to her own reputation as a beauty whose charms had been hidden from the outer world. The cards despatched, she went to the chief confectioners, electricians, florists, and wine-merchants of Paris. She called in upholsterers and tent-makers. She arranged for a series of three large marquees, which were to cover the lawn behind her villa. The house in all its beauty and splendour was to be only a vestibule to these tented halls. The first marquee was to be decorated with palms and tropical plants, and was to serve as a promenade pure and simple. Her drawing-room was to be the entrance to this outer tent, and here she was to receive her guests. The second marquee was to be decorated contrastively with tapestries and Oriental brocades, and here there was to be a concert by some of the first artistes in Paris and in the world. The third and largest tent was the supper-

room, a supper served upon small round tables, and which was to last from midnight till two o'clock.

For this tent Dolores had imagined, and the electricians had carried out, the most distinguished feature of the entertainment. From the silken dome in the centre of the immense circular marquee hung a monster egg-shaped lamp, a lamp of opaline hue, shedding the mildest, milkiest, moonlight radiance upon the supper-tables and the supper-eaters.

This was the roc's egg; and Dolores and her dressmaker had arranged a costume which, without being absolutely a fancy dress, should be so far Oriental in character as to suggest the Princess Badroulbadour.

It was very long since Madame Quijada's daughter had seemed so gay and girlish as in the fortnight during which the upholsterers and electricians and tent-makers were preparing for this eccentric entertainment. Her delight had something of childishness in it, no doubt, but that very childishness fascinated Pedro Perez, and he soon found himself taking as keen an interest in the approaching entertainment as his young wife. She had kept her promise. There was to be no dancing, and none of the gilded youth of Paris had been invited, though Duturque had been besieged by requests for invitations from even the highest quarters. It was to be a fête given to intellect and talent. Beautiful women had been invited, but they were actresses celebrated for genius as well as beauty. The men belonged for the most part to the world of art and letters; but from a list furnished by Perez the world of finance had also been bidden to the fête, and the Bourse would be represented by its most powerful members.

Madame Quijada had been allowed no active part in the preparation of her daughter's first party; but she expressed herself gratified that the gloomy spell was about to be lifted from the house. Louise Marcet assisted in all the floral decorations, for in the arrangement of flowers her taste was unerring; but she told her cousin that she should not appear at the party.

"I should be like the skeleton at an Egyptian banquet," she said, when Dolores pressed her to share in the amusement of the evening. "It would make people melancholy to see so gloomy a figure."

"Poor old Louise!" murmured Dolores, moved to pity by the thought of this blighted life, for which even pleasure had no charm, novelty no fascination; "your misfortunes must have been very

terrible to deaden all your delight in life, to make you so different from other women."

"My misfortunes were not of a common kind, Dolores. If you knew all, you would hardly wonder that I stand alone with the memory of my grief."

"But you have never trusted me with the secrets of your girlhood; you have never confided in me," said Dolores, reproachfully. "Though we are cousins, I know no more about the cause of the illness that changed you than if we were strangers."

"There are some secrets that must be kept—secrets that involve the fate of other people."

"Well, I have never tormented you with questions; I am only sorry to see you unhappy."

"I am used to bearing my own burden, Dolores; and I am very glad to see you so much happier than you used to be."

"Oh, I have made up my mind to make the best of my life, if Perez will only be reasonable, and allow me my own way. I was simply breaking my heart in the Rue St. Guillaume for want of something to do and to think about. I used to read of balls and parties, of all the grand entertainments of Paris, and the gowns and the jewels, while I was sitting solitary, with my diamonds locked up in their cases. And then, as for the rest," with a sigh, "there's no use in crying for the moon, is there, Louise? When one has not what one loves, one must love what one has."

"If you are thinking of Leon Duverdier, I can tell you that he is not worth one regret," said Louise, earnestly. "Try to forget that you ever saw his face."

"I have been trying ever since I married my good old Perez. Yes; you are right, Louise. He is not worth one regretful thought. He never cared for me, and I was a fool ever to care for him."

"He never cared for any living creature except himself, Dolores. His heart is harder than the nethermost millstone."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE ROC'S EGG.

It was within an hour of the dinner party which was to precede Madame Perez's reception, and Dolores was sitting before her dressing-table, while the most fashionable hairdresser in Paris brushed and divided the long tresses of raven hair before building them up after the latest invention of his genius.

"Remember, Monsieur Jeck, my coiffure is to be Oriental—all that there is of the most Oriental," said Dolores, decisively.

M. Jeck shrugged his shoulders despondently. All his inventive and imitative powers had of late been concentrated upon the school of Pompadour and Du Barry. His delight had been to pile a coiffure as high as art, horsehair, and hair-pins could raise the human hair. If he had taken any step in another direction, it would have been a retrograde step. He would have gone back to the Montespan and the Fontanges period, which was also an elevated school. But the Oriental, the school of drooping tresses and long plaits, the school which must needs restrict its operations to the hair that grew on the head of the subject, and could borrow nothing from art!

True, that in the subject now under his hands there was abundant material for artistic treatment, but the Oriental style offered no scope for the caprices of genius.

"Has Madame made up her mind irrevocably?" asked the hairdresser.

"Yes, yes, I tell you. My costume is Oriental."

"Then I have only to submit; but I must warn Madame that the Eastern style—the style of Rebecca of York—is not that which will most set off Madame's beauty."

"I detest Rebecca of York. Make me a coiffure à la Roxalane. Something light and gay. I don't want to look a tragedy queen."

"Has Madame any diamond crescents among her jewels?"

"As many as you like. Rosalie, bring me the case of crescents."

The lady's maid brought a large purple velvet jewel-case, which he placed open on the marble dressing-table. There were crescents of diamonds and rubies, diamonds and sapphires, diamonds and emeralds, diamonds pure and simple.

"Ciel!" said the coiffeur; "I see my way to a startling success."

He wove the soft black hair into three long plaits, and bound them round the small head in a triple coronet, and into this crown of plaited hair he stuck the jewelled crescents with an inimitable taste and lightness, until the dark hair served only as the background to a blaze of jewels.

"Yes, that will do," said Dolores, surveying herself in her hand-glass. "That will do very well for the Princess Badroulbadour."

"I could have pleased myself better had Madame given me greater liberty," said M. Jeck, sighing as he folded his apron.

"You have pleased me, and that is more to the point," replied Dolores, with the air of a duchess, scarcely deigning to acknowledge the hairdresser's departing salutation.

Half an hour later her toilette was complete, and she went down to the morning-room, where she was to receive her husband's guests, the drawing-room being transformed for the evening reception.

Her Badroulbadour gown was of palest rose brocade, falling in long straight folds from the shoulders, clasped across the bust with a splendid heart-shaped emerald, and opening over a white satin petticoat, embroidered with an artful and artistic admixture of beetles' wings and emeralds. To the superficial observer that glittering green embroidery looked one mass of emeralds, and seemed to represent wealth even greater than Perez Peru could command.

The millionaire gazed at his wife in a stupor of admiration.

"Dolores, why on earth have you put on all that splendour?" he exclaimed. "I have always understood that it is bad taste for a hostess to be finer than her guests."

"Nobody cares for good or bad taste under the Republic," answered Dolores. "I want people to talk about my dress, and for that one must be splendid and original. My fête to-night is to be a scene out of the Arabian Nights. Do you think I look like the Princess Badroulbadour?"

"You look very lovely," said Perez, who had never heard of Aladdin's wife.

"And you are proud of me, and that is all I want," answered Dolores, caressingly. "Your human-ingots can appear as soon as they please. Ah, here comes mother."

Madame Quijada had shown no aspiring after originality in her toilette, but she was richly dressed in black brocade and diamonds,

with a Spanish mantilla of valuable old lace, a costume which became her severe style of countenance better than any more brilliant toilette would have done. She was looking ill, and that calm dignity which had distinguished her appearance in the seclusion of the Rue St. Guillaume had given place to a nervous and sometimes restless manner, which a medical man would at once have recognized as the manner of a sufferer from alcoholic poisoning in some form or other.

"I hope you are satisfied at last, madame," said her son-in-law; "all Paris is coming to see what a fool an old man can make of himself for the sake of a pretty woman."

"If the woman is only pretty enough, all Paris will go away convinced of your good sense," retorted Dolores, gaily.

M. and Madame Joffroy were announced in the next minute, and Dolores showed the most amiable *empressement* in receiving a tall, gaunt personage in sapphire velvet and rubies, who twenty years earlier had been the cynosure of a drinking cellar in the vicinity of the Boulevard St. Michel, and who was now the discontented wife of one of the richest men in Paris.

More guests arrived. Herr Hausroth and his daughters, young ladies who gave themselves tremendous airs on the strength of their father's wealth, and who were rendered miserable by their father's shabby coats, and by certain little miserly eccentricities of which he could not divest himself, although living in princely style and allowing his girls to get their gowns from the most expensive *faiseur* in Paris, which meant a corresponding expensiveness in all the minor details of their toilette, the great *faiseur* taking the word "Thorough" for his motto, and insisting upon his clients striving after ideal perfection in the art of dress. "A badly cut corset, or a hair's breadth too much thickness in a petticoat, will spoil my finest conception," said the great *faiseur*

Two more financiers appeared, these without womankind, and in the little bustle and talk which followed upon their entrance, Madame Quijada drew her daughter aside.

"He is in Paris," she whispered.

"Not Leon?" questioned Dolores, nervously.

"Yes, Leon. I received a letter from him just now, while I was dressing."

"I wish never to see him again."

"But he is coming to your party to-night. You must receive him civilly."

"He has no business to invite himself to my party—after leaving Paris without a word of adieu—and never writing to us in all these months."

"He is your cousin. He heard of your party from strangers, and it was scarcely strange he should invite himself. You must be civil to him, Dolores. You were only too fond of him once. You can at least afford to be polite and friendly to him to-night."

"I won't be uncivil," answered Dolores, moodily, "but I wish he were not coming. I don't want him to cross my threshold."

Her face had clouded over, all the girlish gaiety had gone from her manner, as she took M. Joffroy's arm and led the way into the dining-room, where the arrangement of table, flowers, and lighting was exquisite.

All her pleasure in the prospect of the evening's triumph was damped by the return of this man, whose coming had once been looked forward to with feverish impatience, whose absence had made the world seem a blank. She had had much time for quiet thought since her marriage with Pedro Perez, and her whole nature had changed for the better since her position had been legitimated, and she was able to look society straight in the face. Her heart was young enough and warm enough to be touched by an old man's affection; and now that she no longer considered herself a prisoner and a slave, she felt sincerely grateful to her millionaire husband.

Disenchantment had slowly followed upon Leon's prolonged absence. She had begun to question the merits of the man she had admired, and whose misfortunes had appealed to her pity. Little by little she began to see the charlatan where she had seen the genius, and the cold-hearted adventurer where she had imagined the careless, happy-go-lucky student, whose difficulties were a natural result of the artistic temperament.

She had looked back on her intercourse with her cousin, looked back with unprejudiced eyes, and she had seen that his conduct had been mercenary from first to last; that he had taken every advantage of her regard for him, and had given her not one token of affection in return. He had extorted money from her upon every possible pretence, and he had looked with a greedy eye upon her jewels, and would gladly have appropriated them to his own use.

She did not wish ever to see him again, and she dreaded any encounter between him and Pedro Perez. His presence at her reception to-night would be the snake among the flowers.

As the evening went on, however, she tried to banish all thought about this unbidden guest. He would only be one among many, she told herself. She could dismiss him with a word.

The dinner seemed a slow business to the women of the party, but the financiers enjoyed themselves, and were unanimous in their approval of the *menu*. Joffroy told his old friend Perez that he had the prettiest wife and the best cook in Paris. Hausroth was green with envy, and the daughters Hausroth sniggered together at Madame Perez Peru's Oriental costume, although their own famous *faiseur* had so cleverly planned the gown that it offered no marked eccentricity of character, and might have been worn at a ball at the Elysée.

At ten o'clock Madame Perez was stationed in the drawing-room at the entrance to the marquee, where the electric lamps were artfully dotted about amidst the tropical foliage. The light here and in the adjoining tent was subdued in tone, so that when at the stroke of midnight the velvet curtains of the supper tent were drawn back the roc's egg lamp might burst upon the spectators with overpowering brilliance.

The roc's egg was the one feature of the party with which Dolores hoped to startle the spoiled children of Paris.

The two tents for conversation and music filled quickly. Everybody had flocked eagerly to see the beautiful Madame Perez. A curious mingling of the *grand monde* and the *demi-monde* was to be noted among the guests—a new feature in the life of great cities, and an evidence of the march of progress. Great ladies had begged for invitations which had been intended only for actresses and for the wives and daughters of artists with pen or pencil. Ducal coronets were on some of the carriages which were waiting yonder in the wintry darkness of the wood. Dukes and Duchesses had declared that they only wanted to "look in" at the millionaire's party, only to get a glimpse of the millionaire's wife; but finding the palm-shadowed tent a very agreeable lounge, and that Faure and Capoul, and Albani and Maric Roze, were among the singers, great ladies and their cavaliers lingered, and began even to express a mild curiosity about supper, which some one had said was to be served punctually at midnight.

Leon Duverdier approached his cousin immediately after she had exchanged courtesies with the ancient but beautiful Marquise Talonrouge and the lovely *comédienne*, Clara Beauville. He bore himself with his usual assured and supercilious air, but Dolores

noted that he looked pale and ill, and that he was thinner than when she saw him last.

"I congratulate you upon the success of your fête," he said, holding his cousin's hand with a lingering pressure. "All the notabilities of Paris are pouring in at your door. I am glad I returned in the nick of time to assist at your triumph."

"Was it worth while to return at all after you had stayed away so long?" asked Dolores, looking at him with a deliberate disdain which had as chilling an effect as a cold douche after the hot room in a Turkish bath.

"My dear Dolores, matrimony seems to have made a remarkable change in your manner to your own kith and kin," he said, smiling at her. "I hope your head is not going to be turned by social success."

"No, my head will not be turned; but my eyes have been opened. You left Paris without a word to the people who—who cared for you. Can you wonder if they were enlightened by your conduct, and left off caring for one who set so small a value upon the ties of kindred? I think I have learnt to understand your character during your long absence, and that I know you now almost as well as Louise knows you."

His face darkened at the name, and he looked round the room and beyond into the crowded tent, as if he were searching out an enemy.

"I see," he said. "Louise has been slandering me to you. I will not detain you from your guests; but later you must give me a few minutes' quiet conversation. I have something important to say to you. It is a matter of life and death."

"I recognize the old prelude," said Dolores; "*question d'argent.*"

Leon Duverdier moved onward, into the tent where people were promenading amidst a Babel of talk, and to the tent beyond, where Capoul was singing the "Alléluia d'amour."

Yes, the party was a success; and walking about quietly among people who were for the most part strangers to him, Pedro Perez was gratified by overhearing enthusiastic praises of his wife's grace and beauty, her jewels, her costume, and the originality of her reception. True, that he heard more than one witticism at his own expense, and was reminded of a fact which he had never ignored—the fact that he was old, and plain, and insignificant, and that his only value in the eyes of the houri in blush-rose satin and many-coloured gems must needs lie in his millions. He heard, and he

did not despair. There was something—an undefinable change in Dolores—which told him she was not altogether ungrateful; and he thought that if he could pension off Madame Quijada and have his young wife all to himself, free from the mother's sinister influence, there would not be a happier husband in all Paris than he, Perez Peru. As for those airy shafts of ridicule which he had so dreaded in the past, he was resigned to endure them in the future, so long as all went well in his domestic life.

The concert closed with *éclat* in a new part-song, composed by Monsieur Duturque, who had adroitly converted to his own use a certain almost forgotten march in an opera by Lulli, a stirring melody which put the audience in good humour; and with the last chord the velvet curtains which concealed the supper tent were drawn suddenly apart, and the roc's egg lamp bathed the scene in a soft, yet dazzling light, which set off the vivid colouring of fruit and flowers, silver-gilt, and Venetian glass, saumon à la Chambord, and homard en aspic, on the fifty supper tables.

There was a lively chorus of approval from the guests, who had been wondering where the supper was to come from, and whether they were going to be put off with tea and coffee, ices, and iced drinks at the buffet in the dining-room. The fifty tables were occupied as if by magic, and two hundred and odd tongues were chattering about the roc's egg.

"*Quelle belle idée! Mais c'est une féerie. Il n'y a que l'argent pour faire des merveilles. C'est la baguette de la Bourse*——" and so on, and so on, with illimitable variations upon the same theme.

The supper tables were occupied till nearly two o'clock, and there was no failure in the supplies. At two, everybody had supped, and almost everybody had departed, save a few night-bird journalists, who still sat drinking and talking at a couple of tables. Among these was Leon Duverdier.

As the clock struck two, the roc's egg lamp was extinguished, and the curtains fell, leaving the lingering guests in total darkness.

"I call that about the broadest hint our fair hostess could give us," said the editor of a famous Parisian paper; and there was a good deal of talk and laughter from the Bohemian band during some minutes of darkness, at the end of which interval the curtains were drawn back again by invisible hands, and the last guests strolled through the empty tents to the drawing-room, where Dolores was waiting to bid good night, with the faithful Duturques to keep her company. Madame Quijada had retired within the last hour,

and Pedro Perez had sneaked off to his own apartment soon after the opening of the supper-room.

The editor of the *Guerre aux Sots* was full of apologies.

"That is the worst of the brotherhood of letters," he said gaily; "we are so fond of one another's society that it is much easier to assemble than to disperse us. Besides, who would be in a hurry to leave fairyland? If it had not been for the sportiveness of the roc's egg we should have lingered till the sun put that emblem of magic power to shame."

"I am sorry the lamp behaved so badly," said Dolores, with an arch smile.

"Ah, madame, was there not a fairy in league with the lamp, a benevolent fairy, who knows that we are hardworking journalists, who can but snatch a few hours' rest between the tail of to-day's epigram and the head of to-morrow's, and that we need the quiet of the night to elaborate the impromptus of the day."

"I must apologize for my husband, gentlemen," said Dolores. "He is not used to evening parties, so he stole away soon after midnight, leaving my mother and me to represent him."

"Jupiter need not apologize for retiring to his tent of clouds when he leaves Juno and Venus in his place," said the youngest of the scribblers; and then each made his farewell bow, till all were gone except Leon.

He lingered, with a determined air, even after the Duturques had bade good night, the pianiste rapturous at the success of *our* party.

CHAPTER XXIX

CRUEL AS THE GRAVE.

Leon Duverdier and his cousin were alone in the drawing-room. Through the draped opening of the large central window the dimly lighted marquee loomed shadowy, and the tropical foliage had a sombre air. The fountain had left off playing, the electric light had been turned off in all three tents, and the long vista of palms, and flowers, and tapestry, and velvet-curtained archways took a funereal aspect, lighted only by a few small clusters of wax candles placed here and there amidst the foliage.

Dolores looked at her cousin, stifled a yawn, and walked slowly towards the bell beside the chimney-piece.

"I am sure you don't expect me to be inclined for conversation at this late hour, Leon," she said coldly; "so, if you'll allow me, I'll order your carriage."

"Please don't take that useless trouble. I have no carriage. I came in a cab, and dismissed it. I shall walk back to my hotel."

"You are not at your old address?"

"No; I am staying at the Hotel St. Lazare for a night or two. I am only in Paris as a bird of passage. I sail next week from Havre—for Buenos Ayres."

"I hope you will be more fortunate there than you appear to have been here," said Dolores, calmly.

He was dumfounded by the coolness of her reply. Could so brief a separation have worked such a change in the woman who only a few months ago had obviously adored him? He was silent for some moments. The tone of his reply was constrained.

"I congratulate you on the wisdom of your course since I left Paris," he said; "you have only followed my advice. I often told you that Perez was devoted enough to marry you, if you played your cards properly."

"Yes; he is devoted, which is strange—and I am grateful, which may seem even more extraordinary."

"And you are happy, I suppose?"

"Yes, I am actually happy; but I hardly realized till to-night how pleasant it is to be the wife of a millionaire."

"I am glad you have found out the value of wealth—and that your experience has been on the sunny side of the question, and not its dark side. I know the value of money from the lack of it—but I am now on a sure road to fortune. I have a better chance and a finer opening in Brazil than I ever had in my life——"

"I congratulate you," said Dolores.

"But I cannot grasp this golden opportunity without a certain capital in hand. Money makes money, Dolores. A man must sow the golden seed—if only a handful of gold dust—before he can reap the golden harvest. Fortune is at my door, if I can let her in; but I must first find the key that will open the door."

"Your conversation really abounds in allegories," replied Dolores; "but though the variations are new, the tune is always the same. No, Leon, I cannot provide you with the capital for your Brazilian venture. I mean to be a loyal wife to Pedro Perez, and I will do nothing underhand or secret—nothing that could awaken one

jealous doubt in his mind. I know enough of his character to know that with him jealousy would be terrible."

"Then you will do nothing for me? You are wallowing in wealth, and you will not lift your finger to help me?"

"Oh yes, I will do much more than lift my finger. Your new venture is to be made in South America, where my husband is a power. He knows every inch of the country—every speculation and enterprise that has been made there. I will introduce your scheme to him, and ask him to help you."

"And you think he will help me?"

"Yes, when I plead for you."

"I cannot wait for such a slow process as that, Dolores. I know what these old men are, and how long they deliberate before they will trust a young man with a thousand pounds sterling, even if he could buy the philosopher's stone for the money, and offered to share the profits of the transaction. I want money at once, Dolores. Can't you understand that two or three hundred pounds to-night would be worth a thousand next week? And I know you must have as much as that."

"I have not the tenth part of two hundred pounds," answered his cousin, coolly. "I have everything in the world I can wish for, but since I have been Pedro's wife I have had hardly any money. I am Madame Perez. The name is enough. I can order anything I want from any tradesman in Paris, and my name is all I need give in exchange. Pedro pays my bills as fast as they come in. I have nothing to do with money; so you see, if I were ever so willing to help you, I couldn't do it."

There was a pause, during which the man who called himself Leon Duverdier took two or three turns up and down the room, in troubled meditation. Then he stopped suddenly, and confronted Dolores with a frowning brow.

"It is mere idle sophistication to talk to me in this strain," he said. "You can help me, if you like, and you know it. If you have not bank-notes or gold you have money's worth. You have jewels which I could turn into immediate cash at the Mont de Piété. I only ask for the loan of a few of your gewgaws, those you value least, that I may raise money upon them for a month or so. I will remit the money to a friend in Paris as soon as I am in funds; and the jewels shall be safely delivered into your own hands, at the hour and place which you yourself shall appoint. Will that do for you?"

"No, it will not. I will not trust you with one of my husband's gifts—indeed, I dare not. Pedro remembers every jewel he ever gave me, and asks me from time to time to wear particular ornaments. I should be disgraced if I could not comply with his request."

The argument which followed was long and angry. Leon grew desperate as he found Dolores firm in her refusal.

"You had better not goad me too far," he hissed in her ear, as she shrank from him, with her back against the angle of the low marble mantelpiece, and her hand stretched towards the bell. It is a very small thing I have asked of you. Yet the consequences of your refusal may be more disastrous than you can foresee. I may be tempted to throw up the sponge, and to let the world know some secrets in my life, and your mother's share in them. That revelation would be a worse disgrace for you than the loss of a diamond necklace."

He was gone, leaving Dolores mystified by his parting words, but not greatly alarmed. It seemed to her that those words were an idle threat; and that all she had to do was to stand firm in her duty to her husband, who was powerful enough to protect her from her kinsman's malice. There was nothing in her past relations with Leon which could bring evil to her in the future. She had loved him with a sentimental girlish fancy, which had been fostered by the monotony of her secluded existence. Now that she had begun to taste the sweets of life, and to understand the omnipotence of wealth, she looked back and wondered at her girlhood's idle fancy.

"How could I have ever been blind to his selfishness and meanness?" she wondered, when the outer door had closed upon her cousin.

It was four o'clock upon a winter morning. The last faint glow had faded out of the logs, and Dolores shivered in her splendour, as she surveyed her dazzling image in the vast sheet of glass behind a low jardinière filled with hyacinths and narcissus. The image which met her gaze was radiant with gems and brilliant colouring, but the face under the jewelled turban was pale and weary.

"It has been a long, long night," she thought, "but at last I have made my début in Parisian society. Perez Peru's wife is no longer a person to be hidden in an obscure lodging."

The servants, who had been supping luxuriously in their own quarters, now appeared, sober and serious of aspect, apparently intent upon the safe adjustment of locks and bolts, and the putting

away of stray valuables. The last glimmer of light had been extinguished in the marquees, and to-morrow morning all that fairy scene would be taken to pieces, like a child's puzzle, and carted away, while the roc's egg lamp would be sold at a sacrifice to some enterprising proprietor of café or music-hall.

The footman drew aside the plush curtains, and shut the wide plate-glass window, which fastened in the usual manner of French casements; and it may be that under the influence of truffled turkey and champagne he was somewhat uncertain in twisting the long brass bolt into its socket.

"Is all safe?" asked Dolores, listlessly, as she took up her ostrich fan and moved slowly towards the door.

"Yes, Madame."

"Then you may go to bed, all of you."

"Madame will require the services of Elise at her toilette?"

"Not to-night. Tell her to bring me my chocolate at ten to-morrow morning, and on no account to disturb me before that hour."

Now that the tension of supreme excitement was relaxed Dolores felt tired to death. She had been moving about among her guests, and talking, and laughing at every sally of wit or journalist, artist or actor, for five mortal hours; to say nothing of those three quieter hours during which she had presided at her husband's dinner-party. She could hardly crawl upstairs to her luxurious bedroom, and she was far too weary to submit to the somewhat oppressive attentions of a highly trained lady's maid—a maid who had lived but lately with haggard old age, which required to be put together bit by bit, and composed and painted into a ghastly semblance of youth and beauty. She had but just strength to unclasp her jewels—her necklace of matchless pearls, the stars and clusters and hearts and horse-shoes of diamonds, emeralds, and sapphires which studded her bodice, the crescents which flashed from her dark hair. She was just able to take off all these splendours, and to drop them in a careless heap upon her dressing-table; and then she exchanged her silken garment for a loose muslin peignoir, threw back the satin-covered eider-down, and flung herself upon her bed, overcome with sleep.

All was still upon that upper floor. Pedro Perez was sleeping the tranquil slumber of the man who knows that all his investments are safe, and that some of them are yielding him fifteen per cent.; Madame Quijada was sleeping the heavy sleep of senses stupefied by chloral; the servants had crept up to their attics in the Italian roof—that these cubicula were cold in winter and hot in summer

had but little disturbed the repose of the architect who planned the villa;—and on all eyelids in the house sleep lay heavy, save in that one modest chamber where Louise Marcet lay in her narrow bed, and turned upon her pillow from time to time in the long intervals between her brief slumbers. The time was when the tired work-girl's night had been a night of a single sleep; but since that malady in which reason had been nearly wrecked in the agonized brain, Louise had never known what it was to enjoy long and tranquil slumbers. To-night her nerves had been shaken by the noises within and without the house, the din of talk and laughter, the rattle of silver and glass, the loud music of a brass band playing waltzes and mazurkas, the sound of singing, and the roll of carriage-wheels. Gaiety of this kind had lost all fascination for her. She had never tasted such pleasures; and she had no curiosity about that brilliant world of the rich and well-born in which she had had no part. Her day of happiness had been as brief as a butterfly's summer; her pleasures had been of the simplest. She had known the passion of love only in its most ideal aspect. She had never been sickened by the reverse of the picture. The man she had exalted into a hero had been her hero to the end of his life; and her regret for him was so much the keener that she had never had cause to doubt his honour or his worthiness to be loved. Thus the girl's innocent love of a summer day had become the settled worship of a lost lover; and the woman's heart was dead to all but the broken dream of the love-sick girl.

Darkness closed round the villa in the Bois, in those chill hours between night and morning,—bitter cold in the garden outside, but tempered within these walls by the *calorifère* in the basement. There were only two lamps burning in the house—one, the coloured glass lantern in the hall, where the lowered gas gave a subdued glimmer that made the shadows blacker on the staircase and landing; the other, the little antique silver lamp that hung above the bed where Dolores lay in the happy sleep of youth and health, and a heart at ease.

Not a sound in that sleeping household, save the striking of various clocks, with more or less musical chime. Five o'clock! Yes, there is another sound. As the hammer falls on the gong for the fifth time, there is a sound of a window opening softly and slowly on the ground floor—then a pause; and then the cautious

opening of a door—another pause; and again another sound—the stealthy tread of lightly-shod feet on the velvet pile of the staircase.

Louise Marcet hears those sounds faintly in her sleep. Are the servants going down already? It is early for them, considering the lateness of the hour at which they went to rest. She is sleeping somewhat more deeply than usual, worn out by the noises that kept her awake till an hour or so ago. It is her habit to rise when the servants go down in the morning, to be as early as the earliest of the household, and to see that the day's work is begun betimes; but this morning her senses are dull, she mixes the sounds of those footsteps with a confused dream of the past. It is a summer Sunday morning, and her kindly neighbour is coming to call her, that she may be up and dressed and away to the station of St. Lazare, to meet the kindly Englishman, for that promised excursion to Marley le Roi.

Fond dream of days long vanished. Fancy bridges the dismal gulf of years, and the grave where her lover lies; and she hears his voice and sees his face again, just as she heard and saw him more than twenty years ago.

Suddenly the face fades, the voice is silent. She starts up in her bed shuddering, her blood turned to ice at the sound of a woman's shriek—either of fear or pain. She springs from her bed, throws on the peignoir that lies ready in the chair close by, and moves out to the landing, and to her cousin's room. The door is open, and in the dim light of the night-lamp she sees a white figure lying on the carpet, face downwards, and, standing by the dressing-table, she sees her brother engaged in thrusting the heaped-up jewels into his pockets. While she pauses in the doorway, transfixed, he crams the last of the ornaments out of sight, and turns to leave the room, without one glance at the prostrate form near the bed. He recoils with an angry oath at the sight of Louise.

"Stand out of the way," he says savagely, "or I'll settle you as I've settled her."

"Thief—murderer."

"Bosh! She's only stunned. It'll be worse for you than for her if you don't hold your tongue. Let me pass, I say."

"Not with those jewels in your possession," she says, facing him fearlessly.

Before he can prevent her she has locked the door and put the key in her pocket.

"Thief and murderer—your first crime has gone unpunished

because my voice has not been lifted up against you—but there shall be no second crime that I can hinder. I am trusted in this house, and I mean to protect my cousin's property. If you have killed her, your life shall pay for hers. You shall not leave this room till you have given up those jewels, and until I see if she is living or dead."

She moves towards the figure on the ground, and as she does so he looks round and grasps the situation. There is no other way out of the room. The only other door stands wide open revealing the interior of a bath-room in which there is no door—only a great marble bath and white panelled walls. He grasps Louise by the shoulder, and snatches the key from the wide pocket of her dressing-gown.

"Stand aside, and keep a quiet tongue in your head," he whispers threateningly; and then as she clings about him, clutching the collar of his coat, holding him with all the force of excitement that has reached fever pitch, he sees her head flung back and her lips parting in a cry for help. Another instant and she will raise the house. A cruel blow from his clenched hand stifles the cry upon her whitening lips, and then the same deadly hand snatches a knife from his breast pocket, a knife that opens with a spring.

A thrust, and another, and then he grows mad with rage, the blind unreasoning fury of a savage beast, as the lips still strive to cry aloud, and the eyes still stare at him wildly, and the clinging hands still hold him, and so another, and yet another thrust of the murderous knife, till one last gurgling sound escapes from those distorted lips, the stare grows fixed and dull, the fingers loosen, and the bleeding form falls at his feet.

He unlocks the door and runs downstairs, splashed with her blood, a sister's life blood, and creeps out by the way he came in, stealing through the empty tents, spurning the fading flowers, as he dashes out into the cold night, through the silken draperies that mark an opening in the canvas.

He did not mean murder when he entered the house, least of all a sister's murder; but he meant plunder, and he has secured the booty. At daybreak he will leave for Dunkirk; from Dunkirk to Holland, where he will dispose of the gems, minus their delicate Tiffany settings.

Just at the last moment he remembers that he must hide the blood upon his clothes. The stains are darkest and biggest upon his shirt and waistcoat, as his victim clung about him in the death-struggle.

He creeps back into the house, finds some overcoats hanging in a vestibule, and takes an Inverness, which is just long enough to hide his figure to the knees.

This precaution is unlucky, for in going out into the garden he falls into the arms of a gendarme, who, riding quietly by in the night silence, had noticed the opening of the little door in the marquee. The gendarme dismounts, and waits to see who will emerge from that mysterious little door at a quarter-past five in the morning.

And so Leon Duverdier, *alias* Claude Morel, falls into the clutches of the law, and is shut up *au secret* in a felon's cell, to be taken out at intervals and interrogated by the *Juge d'Instruction;* and before night all Paris knows that there has been a daring robbery and a brutal murder in Perez Peru's villa, that the beautiful Madame Perez has been struck to the ground senseless in the attempt to protect her matchless jewels from a burglar, and lies in a precarious condition, and that poor old Perez is half mad with grief and anxiety.

CHAPTER XXX.

DAISY'S DIARY.

It is almost a month since I last opened this book, a month which has brought me daily nearer and nearer in union with him who is to share all my life, and whom I am to love and obey. Yes, obey; the word suggests not the faintest sense of humiliation. I am proud to have a master, such a master. I never had that kind of feeling with my poor dear Cyril. On the contrary, I felt as if he had been given to me as my slave, a person to order about.

For the first few days after that terrible revelation about my step-father I kept my ghastly secret. I could not trust even him whom I had trusted with my whole heart and my whole life. I feared that if I told Gilbert my conviction of Ambrose Arden's guilt; if I showed him how link by link the chain of circumstantial evidence could be put together until the circle was complete, he might consider it his duty to bring about a public investigation, and thus condemn my mother to the horror of knowing what manner of man she had married. But after torturing myself for those few days of puzzled thought and nights of feverish unrest, I could bear my burden no longer. Gilbert saw that there was something amiss with me, that even his presence could not make me happy, and he urged me to confide in him. And so I told him all the dismal story, and my reasons for believing that my father's murder had been plotted by his friend.

I could see by his darkening countenance as he listened that he was of my opinion; but he answered gravely and deliberately—

"Your theory is plausible, Daisy, yet there is no incident in life which may not bear a double interpretation. I certainly believe Duverdier to be the murderer, as surely as I believe him to be Claude Morel under another name; and granting that he is the guilty man, it is assuredly a strange thing that he should dog your step-father's footsteps in this quiet place, and that your lover should renounce the happiness of his life, and go into exile, after overhearing a conversation between his father and that man. The links are strong links; but the evidence is not of a kind that would be

accepted in a court of law; and I doubt if the law will ever touch the man whose moral guilt, granting him guilty, is greater than the guilt of the shedder of blood."

"I don't want the law to touch him; I don't want my mother ever to know how cruelly she has been cheated and deceived. I only want you to understand the horror of it all; and that this man with whom I have to live in daily friendship, or the appearance of friendship, is of all men upon earth the most abhorrent to me."

Half the weight of my burden was lifted off my shoulders after I had shared my trouble with Gilbert. He is so wise, so thoughtful, so just, and temperate in his judgments. He would not allow that the case was established against that wretched man. It was a case for grave doubt, he told me. The circumstances were full of darkest suspicion; but it would be dangerous to condemn a fellow-creature, above all a friend to whom I owed so much, upon such evidence.

I shuddered at the word "friend."

"Oh, I was so fond of him once," I said. "I used to sit upon his knee and put my arms round his neck. I called him uncle because I could not bear to think that he was not related to me. I used to run from my father to him, and one was almost as dear to me as the other. And now to know that he is utterly base, false, and cruel, inexorably cruel, cruel as death itself!"

"We know nothing, Daisy," said my dearest, in his calm, grave voice; "there is nothing absolute or conclusive in all your evidence. The signs of trouble of mind which you have noticed in your step-father may be only the indications of physical disease. We must wait, and watch, if need be, and whether this dire suspicion of yours be brought more fully home to us, or whether we have reason to doubt the grounds upon which it rests, there is at least one point upon which we can have no hesitation: the knowledge of evil must be kept from your mother."

I was inexpressibly comforted by his counsel, and felt that I could better endure to live in the same house with my step-father. I even began to falter somewhat in my judgment of him; and had it not been for the mystery of Cyril's conduct, which I could account for in no other manner, I might have thought myself the victim of a delusion, cruel alike to me and to the man whom I suspected.

But I could not forget the evidence of Cyril's face, which told of dire calamity, or the stern resolve with which he cancelled the bond between us. His tone and manner were those of a man who was fulfilling a painful duty, who submitted himself to a cruel destiny.

Nor was there other and nearer evidence wanting in my step-father's manner to me after the change in my manner to him, which must have been obvious, although I set a watch upon myself always in my mother's presence. On the rare occasions when Mr. Arden and I were alone together, I maintained a resolute silence, and on no such occasion did he ever question me as to my altered bearing. It seemed to me that he submitted to our estrangement as a part of his doom, and that he tacitly accepted my condemnation of him. Not by one word or look did he ever seek to evoke the old tenderness of our relations. He who until a few weeks ago had been to me as a second father was content to become a stranger, and to endure the insult of my sullen silence; content also to play the hypocrite in his wife's presence, and to affect that he and I were on the old affectionate terms. When mother asked me to play to him he praised my playing, and asked for this or that sonata or set of variations. Oh, what a dreadful life it would be if it were not for the comfort and support my true lover has given me throughout this trial!

And all this time there has been an air of gaiety at River Lawn, and mother and Gilbert and I have been full of preparations for the great change in our lives. It will not be such a change for mother and me, though, as it might have been under less blessed conditions; for I shall be her next-door neighbour, and shall be running in and out of the dear home garden every day, and she can run into my gardens, and the ever lovely and beloved arbour where my sovereign lord and king first declared his love can be common ground for both of us. I shall keep copies of my most adorable poets there, and a sketching block and colour-box, and Gilbert shall have a box of cigars or cigarettes in the handy little cupboard where I used to keep my toy cups and saucers when I was a child.

No; my wedding-day will bring no severance between mother and me; and by-and-by, when the end which I foresee shall come, and the shadow is lifted from her life, I shall have that dear mother all to myself again, as I had in the tranquil years of her widowhood.

It is wicked, perhaps, to take comfort in the thought of any one's death: yet can I wish a traitor's life to be prolonged? Can I fail to see the hand of God in that gradual darkening of the gloom which encircles him—the gradual working of that slow poison we call remorse?

Again there has been talk of my trousseau, and this time mother has not found me cold or indifferent. I have taken a keen delight in everything, especially the house-linen, about which I am as earnest as if I had spun it myself, like an industrious Swedish or Norwegian maiden, and had hoarded it in great oaken presses to await my betrothal. I am delighted to say that Gilbert's hereditary linen closet exhibits a vast collection of rags, beautiful Irish damask table-cloths, with the Florestan coat-of-arms woven in the fabric, smooth and lustrous as satin, but as transparent as gauze when the good old housekeeper held them up to the light.

"Single gentlemen never do think of such things," she said apologetically; "I've told Mr. Florestan often and often that new table-cloths were wanted, but he always forgot to order them; and then he was here so seldom, and that made him careless about the house."

"Of course," cried I; "what should he know about table-cloths?"

And then mother and I held a grand consultation, and selected the loveliest patterns, and sent off a big order to a firm in Belfast, and I felt that I was encouraging the manufactures of the Sister Isle. There are Irish poplins in my trousseau, too—soft, lustrous, delicious—warm and substantial wear for my winter honeymoon. Mother thinks of everything—seasons and occasions, comfort and dignity. Without folly or extravagance, my trousseau will be perfect—worthy to be exhibited as an example of sterling British common-sense, as opposed to French frivolity and American ostentation.

We are to go to the South for our honeymoon, but not straight away to fashionable Cannes or cosmopolitan Nice. We are to go first to Bordeaux, and then to Pau and Biarritz, and afterwards to Toulouse, Carcassonne, Nismes, Arles, and so on by easy stages to Marseilles, and thence to Cannes, just to wind up with the Prince of Wales's week, and the dances at the two clubs. I shall be an old married woman by that time, capable of chaperoning my unmarried cousins if they should happen to be at Cannes with my aunt just then. They generally go South in early spring, and leave the doctor to make money in Harley Street.

They all came down to River Lawn last week to congratulate me upon my "promotion," as Flora called it, and they all, aunt included, seem to think I have done a grand thing in getting myself engaged to Gilbert Florestan.

"Not because he is rich," explained Flora, "for measured by our modern necessities he is little better than a pauper, but because he is unmistakably *county*. Your relations never need be ashamed of him."

"*That* is a comfort," said I, enraged at her impertinence; "but I hope you don't suppose I accepted Gilbert in order to gratify my relations, or come up to the requirements of Harley Street. I did not accept him because he is county, and I should have been just as deeply in love with him if he had been a beggar."

"Ah, you may think so, and most engaged girls talk in that style," said Flora; "but I have never heard of anybody in society marrying a beggar since the time of King Cophetua, and no doubt *he* was sorry for it afterwards."

These cousins of mine are the very essence of worldliness, and I seldom stoop to argue about matters of feeling with either of them. They have been on the point of making great matches ever since they were presented, but the business has always stopped short of actuality; and Aunt Emily says that marriage, from a lady's standpoint, will soon become impossible.

"It is easy enough for an only child like you," she said. "Of course *you* are anybody's money; but my poor girls have nothing but their beauty and their accomplishments, and men nowadays are utterly sordid."

This was a speech which would have made me wretched were it possible for me to doubt my true lover; but all the discontented mothers in England might hint and insinuate for a livelong summer day without ruffling my great content. My heart, so far as Gilbert is concerned, is as placid as a summer lake encircled by mountains.

CHAPTER XXXI.

DAISY'S DIARY. "I WILL REPAY."

This morning the question was mooted, Who was to give me away? It was just as breakfast was over, and Mr. Arden had not yet gone off to his hermitage on the other side of the lane.

"Your step-father is, of course, the proper person," said my mother, looking at her husband with her sweet, gentle smile, a look I understand so well, a look which means kindliness, esteem, respect, consideration, but which never yet meant love.

"No," I cried hastily; "there is only one person who must give me to my husband, and that person is my mother."

"My dearest, it would be so unusual for a woman—— " began mother.

Mr. Arden interrupted her hastily.

"Not in the case of a widow, Clara," he said, in his calm, measured way, as if there were no hint of aversion in my hasty protest. "I agree with Daisy—you are the fittest person to give your daughter to the man of her choice. The act will stamp your approval of the union; and Daisy is wise in wishing that it should be so."

Twice he mentioned me by my old familiar name, without the faintest emotion. No witness of that scene could have suspected from his tone or conduct that there was any gulf between us. I sat with my eyes fixed upon the table-cloth, waiting for him to leave us before I could feel happy or at ease.

It was on the morning after this that the dreadful shock came, and still this man of blood was calm and collected, equal to the occasion.

The newspapers are delivered at River Lawn at about ten o'clock, and on this particular morning we were later than usual at breakfast, and the meal was only just over when Mead brought in his tray of papers ready aired and cut.

My step-father took the *Times*, my mother the *Morning Post*. I am only interested in Mead's tray on the mornings that bring

the *World*, *Punch*, or *Truth*; so on Tuesday morning there was nothing to claim my attention, and I sat idly by while the other two read their papers.

An exclamation from my mother startled me from a reverie. "Oh, God!" she cried, rising hurriedly and going over to her husband, with the newspaper in her hand, "it has come, it has come at last. 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord.' My husband's murderer will be punished—after all these years. Ambrose, do you see, do you know what has happened? Have you read?"

"Have I read what? My dear Clara, are you mad?" he asked, looking up at her wonderingly, as she stood before him, with white cheeks and dilated eyes.

"Have you read the French news? A dreadful murder—the murder of a woman by a man who is supposed to be her brother—by a man called Leon Duverdier, *alias* Claude Morel. Claude Morel! The man who killed my husband."

"No, I have not seen the French news," he answered slowly.

A lie! The paper lay under his hand as he spoke, and I saw the heading of the column—"Paris. By Telegraph."

"Read, then; read the account of the murder, and of the man. He is in prison. He was caught at once, this time; taken red-handed. The police in Paris are better than the feeble wretches who let my dear love's murderer go scot-free. Read, read, read, Ambrose!"

She was beside herself with agitation. Her husband started to his feet, and put his arm round her and held her to his breast, held her against that false and cruel heart, whose baseness she knew not.

"Control yourself, Clara, for pity's sake. Remember we have no sure ground for believing that Morel was the murderer."

"Yes, yes, we have, conclusive ground. The use of his sister's name to decoy my husband; that in itself was all-sufficient proof. And now, see, the sister is murdered, brutally, savagely stabbed to death by the same hand."

"If there has been murder done, the murderer will suffer for his crime; and in that case your husband will be avenged."

"No, no; that is not enough. That other, more deliberate crime must be brought home to him. His judges must know what a wretch he is. French juries are so merciful. He will be recommended to mercy. Only the murder of a sister, on the spur of the

moment. There will be the plea of extenuating circumstances. But let them know how he lured an unoffending man to a lonely room and killed him in cold blood, for sordid gain, and even a French jury must condemn him to death."

"My dearest, you are talking wildly. A man can only be tried for one crime at a time. If he be acquitted of murdering his sister, he can then be indicted for the murder of Robert Hatrell. You must be calm and patient."

"Let us go to Paris to-night."

"I will go there, if you like, and find out all about the man and his crime. It would be useless for you to go."

"No, no: I want to be there, in the city where the murderer is waiting for his doom."

"My dear Clara, I cannot allow you to travel under such conditions. I would not answer for your reason if you were to go upon such a journey. Nor could you possibly leave your daughter, on the eve of her marriage, upon any such mad errand. Whatever has to be done I will do. I will go to-night, and will remain in Paris until after this man's trial. I will find out who he really is, and if he is identical with the Claude Morel whose sister your husband once admired. You may rely upon me to do everything that is necessary or expedient. Only, for God's sake, be calm, be reasonable. Remember how precious your life and reason are to your daughter and to me. Remember how both trembled in the balance years ago in this house."

My poor dear mother commanded herself by a great effort. I could see how she struggled with her agitation, how earnestly she strove to be calm.

"I never thought that the hour of retribution would come," she said. "Oh, the wretch, the heartless wretch, to strike a strong man down in the flower of his years, to cut short so dear a life! No, I will not talk of him any more, Ambrose," she said, in answer to a warning look from her husband. "I will be calm and patient, and wait for the end. It is coming, in God's own good time. You need not be afraid about me. Daisy and I will stay here quietly while you go to Paris. And you will send me daily reports. You will not keep me in the dark——"

"Not for an hour."

They went out of the room together, mother leaning on his arm, confiding in him and relying upon him, as if he were the best of men. I was left alone to think over what had happened, and to

consider how this new phase of our terrible history was likely to affect the dear mother.

First, I read the account of the murder in the *Times*, a brutal murder, the act of a thief and desperado. I will not sully this book by recording it here, since its only bearing on my life lies in the fact that this wretch who murdered his sister in a villa in the Bois de Boulogne the night before last, is in all probability the wretch who killed my father. I read the savage history, and then I thought, and thought, and thought; but I only felt so much the more hopeless and miserable; and I saw how futile it was for me to think alone, while the other half of me was not at my side, to help me out of every difficulty. So I just ran into the lobby, put on my hat, and went out into the garden to see if I could find my dearest and best, who would be able to give me wise counsel, and whose very voice would enable me to keep up my courage, were I hemmed round by difficulties.

It is wintry weather everywhere in this last month of the year, but our gardens are so rich in conifers, laurel, and arbutus that they never look bare or cold; and the shrubbery is so sheltered by deodar and cupressus, that an invalid might walk there even on the coldest morning. I knew it was Gilbert's habit to smoke his after-breakfast cigarette on the other side of the fence, and that I was most likely to find him within call. Mother has allowed him to make a gate of communication between his shrubbery and ours, not many paces from the arbour where I first discovered that I adored him. I found him this morning standing close by this gate, with a very grave countenance, evidently on the watch for me, and I saw at a glance that he had read all about the murder.

He had, and we talked the hideous story over together.

"How will it affect Mr. Arden?" I asked.

"If he is the guilty wretch you think him it may affect him most terribly. The man Morel has been taken red-handed, and cannot escape condemnation. If he is the murderer of Denmark Street; if your step-father prompted that murder, as you believe, he may, out of sheer devilry, make a full confession before he goes to the guillotine, denounce his accomplice, and die in the odour of sanctity."

"And then my mother will know everything, and the rest of her life will be made miserable," said I.

My step-father left us this evening. I felt sick with apprehension

when I saw mother bidding him good-bye in the hall, while the carriage waited to drive him to the station; she so full of kindliness and concern for his comfort on the cold night-journey, he pale and sombre, speaking with evident effort.

"You are looking so ill to-night, Ambrose," she said. "I fear you are hardly equal to the journey, and the trouble that may come afterwards."

"I must face both, Clara. My chief anxiety is about you and your peace of mind," he answered gravely. "If you will only be true to yourself, I fear nothing. You have your daughter and her husband to think of; new duties, new ties, the beginning of a new existence."

It seemed to me as if he were renouncing all share in her life, all claim to her affection. He looked at me earnestly, questioningly, and then, as I made no movement towards him, he said quietly—

"Good night and good-bye, Daisy!"

He turned on the threshold and took my mother in his arms and kissed her forehead and her lips with a sudden fervour that transformed him.

The pallid, careworn face flushed and smiled, the dull and sunken eyes brightened. It was for a moment only. His valet warned him that there was no time to lose, he stepped into the brougham, the door was shut, and he was gone.

CHAPTER XXXII.

DAISY'S DIARY.

It is the eve of my wedding day, the eve of St. Valentine's Day; Gilbert is to be my Valentine to-morrow and for ever.

And now in this deep silence of after midnight I will close the record of my life as an unmarried woman. The life that will begin to-morrow will mark the opening of a new volume in my history, but the old book shall be my friend and confidant still, for I shall be able to praise my husband in these pages as I should never dare to praise him to any living listener, least of all to his modest, unpretending self.

I shall close the record of my girlish years, and with it, I hope, closes the tragedy of my own and my mother's life. God grant that bloodshed and guilt and treachery may have no further influence upon her life and mine, and that the road that lies before us may pass through a peaceful and a smiling land, where crime and sin will have no part in our destiny.

The interval between my step-father's journey to Paris and the end of the year was a time of keenest anxiety for me, and for Gilbert, who shared and lightened all my cares. We watched the three principal Paris papers, which Gilbert ordered to be sent him daily, and watched with intense expectation for any notice of the murderer Morel. The actual facts recorded were few, beyond those particulars of the murder which had appeared in the first instance; but there was a great deal of descriptive writing bearing more or less upon the crime. Something of this kind appeared in one or other of the papers nearly every day. Sometimes there was a paragraph about the prisoner's antecedents, the part he took in the riots and brutalities of the Commune, the manner of his escape when the Versailles troops got possession of Paris, and many other facts or fictions about his past life. Gilbert told me that I must not believe more than one-fourth of any such article or paragraphs in a Parisian newspaper.

One day there appeared a long account of the villa which was the scene of the murder, an article in which the luxury and splendour of the house were minutely described. Another article in the

same paper gave a glowing description of the prisoner's cousin, a beautiful young woman, married to one of the richest men in Paris. Scandal about this young woman and her mother was freely published, cruel imputations against their character; but there was not one line in any of the papers which hinted at Claude Morel's identity with the murderer of Denmark Street.

"The police know all about him," said Gilbert, "but they are keeping dark. A man cannot be tried for two crimes at the same time. Were Morel acquitted he could be arrested and brought to London to be confronted with the witnesses—the landlady and the tailor's journeyman—who could identify the murderer of Denmark Street; but I do not see the remotest chance of his acquittal."

My step-father remained in Paris for nearly a month, during which time he wrote at least twice a week to my mother. She read portions of his letters to me. He had seen the police, and they had told him that there was very little doubt of the prisoner's execution. The crime was too utterly brutal to enlist the sympathies of even a French jury. He would be found guilty without extenuating circumstances. He would perhaps appeal to the Court of Cassation, but his appeal would be rejected.

In a later letter my step-father wrote that he had with great difficulty obtained an interview with the prisoner. He had taxed him with the murder in Denmark Street, but Morel had denied all knowledge of that crime. The letter described him as an obdurate villain.

The trial took place in the second week of December. The prisoner's cousin, Madame Perez, was the chief witness against him. She described how he had appealed to her for money, or for jewels to convert into money, two hours before the murder; and how she had refused to give him either money or jewels, upon which he left the house, angry and menacing. She described how she was startled from her sleep by the sound of footsteps in her room, and on opening her eyes saw the prisoner standing before her toilet-table, deliberately filling his pockets with her jewels, which she had worn in great profusion upon that particular evening. She told the court how she had sprung from her bed, intending to ring for help, but before she could reach the electric-bell the accused struck her to the ground. She remembered nothing after that blow, which had inflicted a permanent injury upon the sight of one eye. She had only just recovered from a nervous fever which had followed upon her return to consciousness.

The appearance of this witness in the court excited a profound interest, said the papers. She is described as a very beautiful woman. Her evidence was given in some parts reluctantly, at other times with a rush of indignant feeling. When asked by the prisoner if she had not been his mistress, she passionately repelled the accusation. She admitted that she had once loved him, but that was before she knew the worthlessness of his character. She spoke in the highest terms of the murdered Louise. She denied any knowledge of the fact that the brother and sister had adopted names which were not their own. She had never heard the name of Morel in association with either of them.

The evidence of the gendarme who arrested the murderer red-handed was conclusive. The blood of his victim and the jewels which he had stolen were found upon him. There was little need of deliberation. The verdict was guilty, without extenuating circumstances. The sentence was death.

I can never forget my mother's face when Gilbert told her the doom of Claude Morel. We went together to the morning-room where she was sitting at work, her great basket of flannel and calico on the hearthrug in front of her chair, her pale, anxious face intent upon her stitching. In all this time of suspense she had employed herself chiefly in visiting the poor and working for them. She told me that it was only by constant occupation, useful and mechanical work, that she could steady her nerves, and prevent herself from dwelling incessantly upon the tragedy of her life.

She listened quietly while Gilbert read the verdict and the sentence, and then, with bent head and clasped hands, she murmured those awful words which she had spoken to her husband when she first read of Morel's crime—

"'Vengeance is mine. I will repay, saith the Lord.'"

How often and how often in the time past she must have repeated that terrible text!

She received a letter from her husband the same evening, but it could tell her nothing which the paper had not told her already, except that he intended to remain in Paris for a few days to see if there were any likelihood of a commutation of the sentence.

Five days afterwards my step-father walked into the drawing-room at nine o'clock in the evening, unannounced and unexpected. He had come from Paris by the morning mail.

"I waited till the eve of the execution, Clara," he said, when my mother had welcomed him.

Gilbert and I were sitting at chess in a nook near the fire-place. We stood up to greet him, but kept aloof, as if he had been a stranger.

"It is decided then. There will be no reprieve," said my mother.

"None."

"Then there will be at least one villain less in the world," said I.

He looked at me. Never to my dying day can I forget the agonized reproachfulness of that look. It was a look that made me feel as if I were the ingrate and the traitor, and he only the injured. I saw the picture of my happy childhood—as they say a drowning man sees all his past life in the moment before death. I saw myself with my arms round that man's neck and my cheek against his breast; saw myself soothed and watched over in hours of childish illness; taught and counselled, and amused and trained by that keen intellect; loved and petted, with an inexhaustible patience and an unvarying tenderness, by that grave student, for whom all the world of thought was an open book.

How often, how contiuually, day after day, had he laid aside his dearest occupation to devote himself to the education and the amusement of a child! Yes, he had done all this; he had sacrificed his inclinations, he had made himself a slave for my mother's sake, and to win her he had plotted my father's death.

My eyelids fell and my heart beat fast beneath that mute reproach; but for me his crime was an unpardonable crime. I dared not pity him, even in his agony of remorse; for such pity would have been treachery to my dead father.

My mother urged him to take some refreshment after his journey, and gave her orders to the butler to that end, but he declared that he had dined in London.

"You must have had some time in town between the arrival of the Paris train and the departure of the 7.50 from Paddington?" said my mother.

"Yes; I had nearly two hours; time enough to dine, and to transact a little business in the city."

"In the city? But all the offices would be closed at that time?"

"Not the office I wanted."

He was looking very ill, and had grown thinner in the few weeks of absence. I saw my mother observing him anxiously, as he sat in front of the fire, warming his wasted hands before the burning logs. He talked with some show of cheerfulness, asked about the

preparations for the marriage, and for Christmas. Was it to be a gay Christmas at River Lawn?

"Gay!" echoed mother; "how could I think of gaiety at such a time? My thoughts have been fixed upon one subject. Every effort of my mind has been not to think too perpetually of the man who is to die to-morrow."

"Of the man who is to die to-morrow," he repeated solemnly. "Death cancels all wrong-doing—at least the Law thinks so. The worst *that* you can do to a murderer is to kill him."

He rose slowly, and moved about the room in his old restless way, and then came over to my mother, and bent over her and kissed her.

"Don't sit up for me, Clara," he said; "I have letters to write, proofs to look over, the accumulations of a month. I have sent Ames over to the cottage with my despatch-box. I shall sit there very late, most likely."

"Not to-night, Ambrose, surely not to-night! There will be plenty of time to-morrow," remonstrated mother.

"No, I have left everything to the last. There will be no time to-morrow. Good night, dear love."

He nodded to Gilbert and me, a cool, curt nod, and was gone before my mother could remonstrate further.

"How pale and haggard he looks!" she said. "I was wrong to let him go to Paris upon such a painful business, in his weak health. What would Sir Andrew say to me if he knew how his advice had been disregarded?"

"Sir Andrew recommended rest, I suppose?" said Gilbert.

"He told my husband that it was essential for him to take life quietly."

"Ah, doctors tell us that—but will the heart and brain cease from troubling, at a physician's bidding?"

My mother sighed, and sank into melancholy silence; and our game went on slowly, quietly, in the silent room, where there was no sound but the light fall of wood ashes on the hearth.

My mother came to me at seven o'clock next morning, and told me that her husband had been at work all night. She had watched his lamp from her bedroom window, being herself too agitated to sleep, or even to lie down for more than half an hour at a time. The lamp had been burning till daybreak, when she saw it extinguished.

I too had watched that lamp, wondering what the guilty soul was suffering in that long night—whether he wished himself in the condemned cell where that vulgar villain was waiting the dawn of his last day, whether he would have welcomed the knife as a short, sharp cure for the pangs of a guilty conscience.

My step-father had never before spent a whole night at the cottage, and indeed had seldom occupied himself in his library of an evening. This unaccustomed night-watch made my mother uneasy, and she asked me to go across the road with her, to see if there were anything amiss.

"He may have fallen asleep at his desk," she said, "and in a cold room; for I dare say he has not been careful to keep the fire burning all night."

He had dismissed his valet when he went over to the cottage, and was alone there, except for the existence of an elderly woman who lived in the back premises, cleaned and aired the rooms, and made fires. We went across the road together, mother and I, in the bleak winter morning. The sky was red above the leafless elm-tops, towards London, but gray and gloomy in every other direction. The neglected garden, and the cottage itself, looked very dull and dreary in the chilly dawn, the sodden creepers hanging from the walls, the plaster blotted with damp.

"What a dismal house! To think that Ambrose and his son lived in it for ever so many years," murmured my mother.

She had only to turn the handle of the door to go in—there was no bolt or lock to shut us out. I followed her into the dark passage, and into the room on the right of the porch, the room which my step-father called his den, a room lined with books from floor to ceiling.

"Yes," whispered my mother, "he has fallen asleep."

The atmosphere was close and hot, and reeked with the odour of lamp oil. A pair of candles had burnt down to the sockets, and the ashes were gray in the grate.

My step-father's head had fallen upon his folded arms, and upon the table in front of him there was a long official envelope, directed in a large firm hand—"For my wife."

I read the words across my mother's shoulder as she bent down to speak to her husband, and I guessed what dreadful thing had happened, and what new horror she would have to bear.

"Come away, mother, come away!" I cried; "he is dead! I know he is dead!"

She bent over him still, and lifted the heavy head, and looked at the ashen countenance. Yes, it was the end. Death cancels every wrong. Ambrose Arden's words of the night before came back to me as we stood there in that awful silence which his voice could never break again.

Vain now all hope of keeping the truth from my mother. That envelope, no doubt, contained the admission of his guilt. She would know, and she would suffer from that knowledge.

She burst into tears as she hung over the lifeless clay.

"Oh, Daisy," she sobbed, "he has gone from us for ever! Our voices cannot reach him now. I was never half grateful enough for his love or his goodness to me."

"Don't lament him, mother—he was not worthy," I said; but my tears were streaming too; and I saw the dead man as he seemed to me in my childhood, before my father's death, before he had begun to plot murder.

We knew before that day was ended that he had died from an overdose of chloral. He had had strength of will and purpose to throw the empty bottle under the grate, where it was found broken among the cinders. Thus it was that mother and I did not suspect a suicide, when we found him cold and lifeless at his desk.

She has not told me the contents of the packet, but I know from her manner that she has nothing more to learn about my father's death, albeit Claude Morel died without having made any admission of his guilt. She has been full of sadness since her husband's funeral, in spite of her brave attempt to sympathize with Gilbert and me. The wedding has been delayed for nearly two months in deference to my step-father's memory and the *bienséances*. The coroner's inquest resulted in a verdict of "Death by misadventure."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

AMBROSE ARDEN'S CONFESSION.

To-morrow morning, before the day is old, Claude Morel will expiate his last and worst crime on the scaffold. He is now sitting in his condemned cell writing his confession, the story of the murder in Denmark Street, the hideous history of his crime and of mine, which he has sworn that he will leave behind him to-morrow morning to be published broadcast to all civilized Europe before to-morrow night.

This room, where I sit in the deep of night, in a silence rarely broken by some belated footfall in the lane; this room, lined round with books, mute companions of my joyless manhood, is *my* condemned cell. The day that will dawn in a few hours will be as surely my day of doom, as it will be Claude Morel's. The sentence of death that was pronounced upon him was a sentence of death pronounced upon me. His fate involved my fate. When I made him the instrument of my crime I made myself his slave.

Oh, my beloved, the only idol of my life, it is for you I write the history of my sin. No other eye but yours need ever look upon these lines, unless you so will it; and I do not think you will expose this dark record of weak passion and unscrupulous crime to an indifferent public. Let the world know my story only as it will be told by my accomplice—a ghastly story, cruelly and brutally told, no doubt. These details of my temptation and my fall are for you alone; for you who may perhaps execrate my memory just a little less if I urge my one plea for mercy—I loved you with a love that was stronger than honour or manhood—stronger than all the instincts of a life that had been blameless whilst it was passionless—a love that made me a villain.

I first saw Claude Morel at an Italian public-house in Greek Street, where I went to distribute some money, collected from a few of my friends, among the distressed Communists who had come to London for a refuge, and who were some of them almost starving.

Most of the people assembled in that upstairs room over the tavern bar were depressed and dispirited by their necessities, and had very little to say, except to express their thankfulness for the aid which I took them; but Morel had a great deal to say about the political situation in France. He spoke well, and I was interested in his fervid eloquence, and in the latent passion which burned in every phrase. I put him down as a dangerous man in any country, a firebrand in such a city as Paris.

He heard, *en passant*, that the friend who had given more than half the sum I had collected was Robert Hatrell. I saw the startling effect of that name upon him, and I was hardly surprised when he followed me into the street and began to question me about my friend. I *was* surprised, however, at the malignity of his speech, and the intensity of malice which betrayed itself in his tone and manner.

He told me the story of a sister's wrongs. She had been fooled and duped by a wealthy Englishman, who coolly refused any reparation for the wrong he had done—for a girl's blighted name and broken heart. He was not very explicit in his charges, but this was the kind of thing which he gave me to understand, and he was just as vindictive as if he had been certain of his facts.

I heard the true story of the case from your husband afterwards, and he gave me his honour that his worst offence had been a sentimental flirtation with a grisette, an innocent unsophisticated girl, with whom he had been almost seriously in love. His attachment had just stopped short of a serious passion; and he had but just escaped the folly of a low marriage.

I believed my friend's statement, and thought no more of Morel's malignity, which I did not suppose would ever take any overt form, though I considered it my duty to warn Robert Hatrell of the existence of this vindictive feeling, and to let him know that his enemy was in London. He laughed at the man's threats, and the subject was dismissed by us both.

I had almost forgotten it when I met Morel in Gower Street one afternoon on my way from the Museum to the Metropolitan Railway Station. He told me his troubles, the difficulty of getting employment, his schemes and inventions, which sounded chimerical in the last degree, and his want of money. He talked again of my friend Hatrell, but I stopped him peremptorily.

"I have heard your sister's story from my friend's own lips,"

I said; "and I am convinced that your version is a tissue of lies."

He was furious at this. He upbraided me for believing a gentleman in preference to a man of the people. It was the old story. The well-born seducer could always escape the consequences of his wrong-doing; but for once in a way the world should see that retribution may follow wrong. Robert Hatrell had broken his sister's heart, and had grossly insulted her; and he meant to be even with him.

He asked me for half a sovereign, but I had only a few shillings about me; so he gave me a card with a written address upon it, begging me to send him a post-office order next day.

I have since discovered that he had appealed to your husband for money, and had been sternly refused; and no doubt that refusal was a more unpardonable offence than any sin against his sister.

It was within a week of this accidental encounter with Morel that I received an unexpected visit from my father's old lawyer. He came to Lamford in order with his own lips to communicate some very wonderful news. A second cousin of my father's had lately died in Chicago, leaving me his residuary legatee, and, with some insignificant exceptions, the inheritor of a large fortune acquired in trade. I had never even heard of Matthew Arden, who had begun life with a small estate in the East Riding, where he farmed his own land, and had ended life as one of the richest merchants in Chicago. For me this fortune was a fortune dropped from the clouds.

I was astounded, but hardly elated by this sudden change from poverty to wealth. The studious life I was leading was the only life I should ever care to lead. Money, except so far as the indulgence of my taste as a collector of books, could be of very little use to me; and even my taste in books was inexpensive. I did not pine for tall copies or rare editions. All I valued in a book was its contents. At this time I had not attained to the fine instinct of a collector.

I told my old friend that I should make no difference in my mode of life, and that I should tell my son nothing of this change in our fortunes for some time to come. I begged the good old family lawyer to exercise the discretion which had always been his distinguishing quality, and to take care that no newspaper

paragraphs descriptive of my unexpected luck had their source in his office.

When the lawyer left me I sat alone among my books, and thought over the change in my fortunes. A stroke of luck which would have made most men half mad with joy left me cold. What could wealth give me? Nothing, for it could not give me you.

Yes, Clara, it was of you, and you only, that I thought, as I tried to estimate the value of these riches that had fallen into my lap. What was their worth to me; what could they do for me; what could they buy for me? Nothing, nothing, nothing!

I was still a young man; I was not ill-looking; and I had some pretensions to intellectual power. Hitherto poverty had exercised its restraining influence upon me. I had lived obscurely, remote from the world. I might now, if I pleased, make a figure in society, live in a fine house, and surround myself with fine people.

I had no more inclination to do this than I had to head an expedition to the North Pole. Society had no pleasure to offer me. Neither house nor garden nor stable had any attraction for me. I was not a sportsman. I was not a yachtsman. I had never felt the faintest interest in a race on land or water. I had but one passion, one dream, one desire upon earth, or beyond the earth—and that was you. My whole being resolved itself into one ardent longing—to win you.

I loved you from the first day I saw you. Oh, God! how vividly I can recall that first day and hour, that casual meeting which decided the whole course of my life, for good or evil! Your face flashes out of the shadowy distance beyond the lamplight—a vision of gladness and beauty—as it shone upon me that clear October morning, when you stood before me leaning against your husband's arm, newly returned from your honeymoon, a two-months bride.

You remember our first meeting, Clara; how I looked in through the open gate and saw you standing deep in conversation with your husband and his architect, who was holding an open plan for you both to look at. I had made Mr. Hatrell's acquaintance a few days before, when he came down to Lamford alone, and we happened to travel in the same railway carriage.

He introduced himself to me as my future neighbour, and insisted upon giving me a lift in his fly from the station, though I told him it was my habit to walk home.

"I want you to tell me all about the neighbourhood," he said.

This had broken the ice, and on this second time of seeing each other we exchanged friendly salutations through the open gate; and then as I lingered a little he called me into the garden and introduced me to his wife.

I remember your courteous greeting—so courteous yet so careless. How could you dream that I was to be so potent a factor in your sum of life! How could you guess that the lovely face which you turned towards me, so unconscious of its power, was to change the whole current of my existence—to make me first your passionate lover, and next your husband's murderer!

Yes, Clara, his murderer. From that hour I was foredoomed to do evil for your sake. I was fated to blight your happiness, and to miss being happy, even though I gained the wages of my crime.

What did I think of you that day? Only that you were the most enchanting woman I had ever seen, and that Robert Hatrell was a man for all other men to envy. My thoughts went no further than that on the first day. I thought of your loveliness as I should have thought of some rare flower—the white chalice of the Victoria regia floating in the faint tropical haze of a still water-pool, the pale purple or vivid gold of some fairy-like orchid—something delicately beautiful that did not come within the scope of my life. I had no more definite thought of you than that; yet afterwards I knew that I had loved you from the first. The change was in myself, not in my thoughts. A slow consuming fever was kindled in me that day which has never ceased to burn. Little by little, by infinitesimal stages, it has burnt up heart and brain.

Your husband liked me, and you were always kind. For the first years of our acquaintance we met but rarely; and it was not till you were established at River Lawn that I came to be intimately acquainted with you both, and gradually to be almost one of the family. Daisy was the link which united us. I had the good fortune to win the child's love, and this assured me of the mother's friendship. You loved books, while your husband cared little for reading or any intellectual pursuit, being, above all, a man of action. I was able thus to supply something wanting in your life, and to fill a place which he ought to have been able to fill. I was the adviser of your studies, and the sharer of your ideas. I felt some-

times as if I were the husband of your intellect, as he was the husband of your heart.

Had I ever seen any wavering in your fidelity to him, any weariness of the tie that bound you to him, I do not believe that I should have tried to turn it to my own advantage. I could not have degraded you by one unworthy prayer. I could not couple dishonour with your image.

There were times when our calm friendship, our mutual love for your child, which kept us in touch with one another, seemed to me almost enough for my happiness. I felt as if I could have gone on contentedly thus, to old age, making a quiet third in your life—now with your husband, now with your daughter, always subordinate—the shadow beside your sunshine. And then, while I was cheating myself with these calm thoughts, a wave of passion would sweep over my being; a demon of jealousy would rend and tear me; and I could not endure to be with you in the serene atmosphere of domestic love. Your husband's every look and every tone tortured me.

You have both of you reproached me sometimes for keeping aloof, for burying myself among my books, and shunning the hospitalities of River Lawn. If you could have seen me in those supposed-studious intervals, you would have seen a man possessed of devils, given over to perdition.

Imagine these years of alternate storm and calm; imagine a mind and heart burnt up by one devouring passion, worn out with the monotony of despair; and then think what my thoughts must have been as I sat in my solitude and brooded over the worthlessness of my newly-acquired wealth.

Had you been free, fortune would have meant everything for me. Had you been free—the widow of a rich man—it would have been a hard thing to approach you as a pauper. My pride would have revolted against owing all to you, fortune as well as happiness. But now—now that I was rich—your equal at least in fortune, my motives could not inspire doubt even in the meanest mind. Were I to wed you no malicious worldling could ever say of me, "He gained all by that lucky marriage."

Were you but free!

I began to meditate upon the uncertainty of life, and to picture to myself the accidents and sudden unforeseen diseases by which men as young and vigorous as Robert Hatrell are sometimes taken away. I thought of railway accidents, and imagination conjured

up the picture of some such catastrophe in all its vivid detail—an engine off the line, a coach or two wrecked, and Robert Hatrell lying dead upon the side of the embankment. I pictured the sudden horror of his home-coming upon the shrouded bier. Your agony, your tears. I passed over those lightly, thinking of how it would be my lot to console you, slowly, patiently to win you back to happiness and a new love. I never doubted your love for him; I knew that your heart was entirely his; but I thought I had an influence over your mind which would speedily ripen into love, he being removed.

I understood you so little, you see, Clara. I had not fathomed the mystery of your heart. He has been dead nine years, and you love him still. You have never loved me.

I thought of the river, saw him rowing towards the sunset, with his strong, slow stroke, in such a scene as our English landscape-painters love; the village church beyond the low line of rushes; the clustering willows, pale in the evening haze; the glory of the sunset behind church-tower and tall elms.

I thought that even on that placid river there were possibilities of danger—a boat of silly, chattering Cockneys upset, a strong man swimming to their rescue, and losing his life in the struggle to save those unknown lives. Such things have been.

I thought of fevers which seize men suddenly in the full vigour of youth. I thought of insidious diseases which creep upon a man unsuspected, and sap the citadel before he knows that Death in one of his numerous disguises is at the door.

Last of all, I thought of Morel, and his threats of vengeance.

I laughed at the notion. Harmless thunder, no doubt. It is common enough for angry men to threaten; but threatened men live.

There was something in my recollection of Claude Morel which made me dwell upon his image in that long reverie, as the lovely light of the June afternoon slowly faded, and the gold of the western sky shone into my room, dazzling my dreaming eyes. I recall the colour of the sunset, the feeling of the air as it gradually cooled into evening. I recall every half-unconscious impression of hours which marked the crisis of my life, and saw me change from an honest man to a villain.

There were in Morel's tone and manner certain indications of a malignity which I had never seen in any other man. There was

a concentration of purpose, a resolute intention to injure, which must ultimately take some definite form, I told myself, unless cowardice should intervene. And I did not think Morel a coward. The man had so little to lose. His fortunes were desperate enough to make him daring.

What if the opportunity arose, and he were to murder the man he hated—the man who had refused to help him in his distress? I implicitly believed Robert Hatrell's account of his love affair, and I did not give Morel credit for caring much about his sister's reputation. He had tried to make money out of the Englishman's caprice, but he had failed ignominiously. Hence, and hence only, that rancorous hatred. He was of the temper which in the hour of misfortune would turn like a tiger against the fortunate—the temper of men who surge up out of the paving-stones and gutters of every great city in the time of revolution, and who do evil for evil's sake. Upon the conscience of such a man as that murder would sit lightly.

What if he really meant murder? I pictured that sinister figure lurking in the rustic lanes, lying hidden in a dry flowery ditch, under the spreading hedgerow, ready with pistol or knife when his enemy passed by.

Opportunity? Why, if he meant murder, it would be easy enough for him to create his opportunity. But when the thing was done, when that gnawing rage had satiated itself, there would be nothing gained but the gratification of his anger, and there would be the hazard of the gallows.

The murderer's craft may minimize that risk. The old saw, that murder will out, has proved a lying proverb of late years. The art of murder has progressed with the march of civilization, and the modern murderer is more than a match for the modern policeman.

I recalled a murder which had interested me curiously years before, when I read the account of it in a London newspaper, I being then remote from London, amid the stillness of the Welsh hills.

It happened in the days when trade union was called conspiracy, and when the law of the land bore heavily upon workmen who banded themselves together against their employer. A certain set of men had conspired; there had been outrages and violence in a certain northern city, and attempted arson. The ringleaders were denounced by one of themselves, were tried, found guilty, and

sentenced to transportation for life. The man who betrayed them dared not remain in his native city. *There* he knew himself to be a marked man; but he thought he would be safe in London, under an assumed name.

He came to London, got employment readily, for he was a clever workman, and funded the price of his treachery as a nest-egg for his old age.

Going homewards one day, at his dinner hour, he walked along a quiet street in Soho, which he was in the habit of passing through daily. Midway this street is intersected by a narrow alley. As the man came in front of the opening he was shot dead by some one standing in the alley, waiting for him to pass. No one ever knew what hand fired the shot. It was in broad daylight, in the heart of a busy district, but the murderer disappeared as easily as if he had been spirit and not flesh. I tell you of this long-forgotten crime, Clara, because it was the nucleus of evil thoughts which slowly took the form of murder.

My wicked scheme did not shape itself all at once. For many days and nights I was haunted by the image of Claude Morel, haunted by the tones of his voice, the lurid light in his eyes when he talked of his enemy. Again and again I found myself mentally measuring the force of that hatred which had expressed itself in biting tones and malevolent looks. Did it amount to so much, or so much, or so much? Was it really strong enough to plan and accomplish an assassination, in broad daylight, in the streets of London, a deed as daring as the murder of the workman who betrayed his comrades?

All this time my life went on upon the old lines—the calm monotony of rustic surroundings, the unvarying graciousness of your friendship. Your child sat beside me at her books, under the willow, or hung upon my shoulder in her exuberance of love; and there was no instinct in her childish mind to warn her that the man she loved and trusted had given himself over to the powers of hell.

I am not sufficiently orthodox to believe in a Personal Devil any more than I believe in a Personal God; yet in those days I could not divest myself of the feeling that wicked influences outside my own existence had got hold of me—that the hideous hopes and schemes that I was for ever revolving in my mind were prompted by a power of iniquity greater than my own.

While the wicked web was slowly spreading, the man who was the incarnation of my own sinful longing appeared upon the scene. He had written me two or three begging letters after that chance meeting in Gower Street, and I had sent him small sums of money, such amounts as a man of my supposed means might send to such an applicant. These concessions had made him bolder, and he came to my house in the dusk of a summer evening, having walked all the way from Staines. He had just the railway fare to Staines, he told me, and no more. I took him in and fed him, and let him sit at my table and vapour about his inchoate inventions, all burked for the want of capital. I let him talk of your husband, and I answered all his questions about the man he hated. I told him of Robert Hatrell's happy and peaceful life, his prosperity, his last fancy for sinking four thousand pounds in the purchase of a few acres of land to increase his pleasure grounds.

"In your native South, I take it, you would be able to buy an olive wood and a vineyard with that money?" I said.

He nodded yes, and went on eating and drinking, in a meditative silence.

"Now, were any man as savage a foe to Robert Hatrell as you pretend to be," I said, after a long pause, "he would have a good chance of taking his revenge and making his fortune some time next week."

He looked at me wonderingly, and I explained that Hatrell would have to pay for the land in Bank of England notes. It was an old-fashioned etiquette with solicitors to expect to be paid in bank-notes, even when a man's cheque was as good as the bank paper. Hatrell would go up to London on an appointed day, cash his cheque at his bank, and then carry the money to the solicitor's office. I told him casually the name and address of the bank, and the name and address of the solicitor; and I saw him sitting there before me, with his eyes kindling like two burning coals, and his under-lip trembling curiously as his halting breath came and went.

"Hatrell and his money will be safe enough," he muttered at last. "A man can't be robbed and murdered in broad daylight in such a city as London."

"There you show your foreign ignorance of our manners and customs," I said; and then I gave him the brief history of several metropolitan assassinations which had occurred within my memory.

He became very serious and silent, sitting before his empty plate,

with his chin drooping on his chest, his inky brows bent in a thoughtful frown. Suddenly, after an interval which seemed long, he lifted his head and turned and looked at me, with a devilish cunning in his eyes.

"You hate Robert Hatrell as much as I do," he said. "You are in love with his wife, I dare say."

"Nonsense. I am only trying to prove to you that all your talk about hatred and revenge is so much melodramatic bluster, and that you haven't the slightest intention of injuring my friend."

"Your friend! your friend!" he repeated, mockingly.

And then, after another interval of silence, during which he walked over to the window and stood looking across the placid summer twilight, in the direction of River Lawn, he came over to me and stood in front of me, looking at me fixedly and emphasizing every sentence with a sharp rap of his knuckles upon the table.

"You want that man killed, so do I; *cela se comprend.* I would kill him for sixpence; kill him for the mere pleasure of making him understand that he was a fool to trifle with Claude Morel's sister, and a greater fool to insult Claude Morel. I take too lofty a view of the situation perhaps. That is in my blood. We Provençals do not easily pardon an injury or an insult. I would kill him for sixpence; but I would much rather kill him for four thousand pounds. You say the purchase is to be completed next week?"

I nodded yes. My dry lips refused to speak.

"Let me know the day and hour. Let me know, if you can, the route he is likely to take from Pall Mall to Lincoln's-Inn-Fields. Give me twenty pounds to be ready for what I have to do, and in order that I may have a few pounds about me to get out of England in case of failure. Do this, and you may lie down to-night secure in the thought that Robert Hatrell's days are numbered, and that his wife will soon be his widow."

I gave him two ten-pound notes without a word.

"I'll think about the other part of the business," I told him.

"Remember, if I am to act you will have to be prompt and decisive," he said. "I can't stir a step without exact details. I shall shift my lodgings to-morrow, so as to be near the scene of action. My present quarters at Camden Town are too far afield."

His devilish coolness was too much for me. I told him I had been talking at random. I meant nothing except to test him. He

had proved himself a greater villain than I had thought possible, and I never wanted to see his face again.

"You will think better of that," he said. "I'll telegraph my address to-morrow morning, and I shall wait for your instructions."

Not till the last moment—not till I crossed the threshold of the Post Office at Reading an hour after your husband left for London on that fatal day—did I make up my mind that I was going to do this hideous thing. Again and again and again with agonizing iteration I had argued the question. I had told myself that this horror could not be; that I, Ambrose Arden, was not the stuff of which murderers are made; and again and again and yet again my thoughts had gone back to the pit of hell, and I had pictured you free to return my love, and I had thought that such love must finally win its reward; that in all intense passion there is a magnetic power which can compel responsive passion, as fire will spread from one burning fabric to another that was dark and cold till the flame touched it.

When your husband left the gate that morning I knew that I must act at once, or never. I walked to the station, caught the slow train that left half an hour after the express by which he travelled, and went to Reading, where the wording of my telegram was not likely to arouse official curiosity. I had only one fact to communicate—the hour of Hatrell's appointment with Florestan's solicitor. Morel knew the locality of the Bank, and it would be for him to watch and find out the route from Cockspur Street to Lincoln's Inn.

Can you think what my feelings were that night when you came over to this house at ten o'clock to tell me that your husband had not returned?

I knew then that one of the most hellish schemes ever hatched had been carried out to the bitter end, and that the murder had been done. Did Judas feel as I did, I wonder, before he went and hanged himself? I did not give myself up to that blind despair of remorse which moved him who betrayed his Master. I was baser, harder, viler than Judas—for I stood that night with your hands clasped in mine, pretending to comfort you, repeating lying assurances that all would be well, while my heart beat madly with the thought that you were free, and that it would be my life's dear labour to win your love.

And through those days of doubt and horror I acted my part, and hypocrisy came easy to me. Anything was easy, so long as I was with you, consoling, advising, sustaining; you leaning upon me in your innocent unconsciousness of the deep flood of passion that surged below the steadfast quietude which I had schooled myself to maintain.

Throughout those days I was haunted by the fear that the murderer would be caught, tried, and condemned, and that he would reveal my part in his crime. I feared that which has now come to pass, after a respite of nearly nine years.

Then came the darkest period of all my hateful life—the period of your illness, when your life hung in the balance, when every day that dawned might be your last on earth. I lived through that time, a time of fear and trembling, which I shuddered even to remember, years afterwards.

And then, and then came my great reward—the reward of treachery and bloodshed, base betrayal of a noble friend, a long tissue of lies and hypocrisies; then, after years of patience, during which I had shrunk with an unconquerable hesitancy from putting my fate to the touch, I had the price of my sin. Your love, no! That love for which I had sinned was no nearer my winning after seven years' apprenticeship than it was while my victim lived. You gave me gratitude—gratitude to me who had blighted your happy life. You rewarded me for the steadfastness of a friendship which in somewise linked my image with that of your murdered husband. Oh, how you will abhor my memory when you look back upon your self-sacrifice, your generous payment of a fancied debt! How you will hate yourself for having been trapped into a loveless union with the man who plotted your husband's death, who was to all intents and purposes his murderer!

Well, it is all over now. I grasped the Dead Sea fruit, and tasted the bitterness of its ashen core. I knew that you did not love me—and I was more miserable as your husband than when I waited at your gate as a suitor. There were glimpses of Paradise then—gleams of hope shining on my crime-darkened spirit; but afterwards, when I had constrained you to be mine—when I had won all that Fate could give me, I knew that your heart was with the dead.

> "Nought's had, all's spent,
> When our desire is got without content."

That was the motto of my life.

Then came a new horror—a haunting fear of the dead, which I take to have been rather physical than mental. Could I, disciple of Schopenhauer and Hartmann,—I who had graduated in the school of exact science, and reduced every thought and feeling to its logical sequence, admitting nothing which my mind could not conceive—could I be the sport of ghostly forms and unreal voices? I to be haunted and paralysed by the dread of a shadow—I to tremble and turn cold on entering your husband's study, lest I should see a pale image of the dead seated where the living man used to sit—I to walk those familiar gardens with an ever-present dread of a well-known footstep sounding behind me, or, when no imaginary sound pursued me, with an absolute certainty that I was being followed by the noiseless movements of a phantom! I to become the slave of such fears—I who believe in nothing beyond the limitations of our understanding—who have restricted all my speculations to the real and the finite!

I knew from the first that these horrors had their source in shattered nerves and broken health. I knew that I was as much a sufferer from physical causes as the victim of alcoholic poisoning who sees devils and vermin about his bed. Yet the thing was as real to me as if I had been the firmest believer in supernatural influences; and I suffered as much from these false appearances and imaginary sounds as the believer could have suffered. *That* is one form which retribution has taken. The other form has been my ever-present sense of disappointment in not having won your heart. Tortured thus, life has been only a synonym for suffering; and I can look forward coldly and calmly to the coming daylight, when I shall have ceased to live.

How can I plead to you at the close of this full and deliberate confession? How dare I hope that you can have any feeling except loathing for the writer of these lines? For myself, therefore, I will ask nothing. I ask only that you will be kind to my son, who, if Morel carries out his threat, must bear henceforward the burden of a name blurred by his father's infamy. He has a fine character, and will reward your kindness. His mother was one of the best and purest of women; think of him as inheriting her virtues and not my dark and evil spirit. It is not in his nature either to love as I have loved, or to sin as I have sinned.

Yes, you will be good to my son, I know, Clara. You will forget that there is one drop of my Judas blood in his veins. You may

know now, in this day of eonfessions, why he left us—why he broke the tie between him and Daisy, and shook the dust of his father's dwelling off his feet. He had found me out. Aeeident had put him in the way of hearing his father's guilt pronouneed by the lips of the wreteh who exeeuted the erime which his father had only meditated in evil dreams.

Claude Morel hunted me out in our house in London, and foreed his way to my study in order to ask me for money. It was not his first attempt upon my purse after our joint erime. I had been pestered by letters from him, sometimes at long intervals, sometimes in rapid sueeession; but I had answered none of those letters; and now when he dared to foree an entranee into my house I was rigid in my refusal of money. I knew what the word *chantage* means for a Frenehman of his temper; and that if I onee opened my purse to him I should be his slave for ever. I was no eoward in my relations with that seoundrel, although he threatened me with the one thing whieh I had to fear. He threatened to tell you the story of his erime, and how he took the first hint of it from my lips. He had kept the telegram sent from Reading on the morning of the murder —the telegram giving the hour of your husband's appointment; and he swore that if I denied him substantial help he would tell his story to you, and lay that telegram before you.

I bade him do his worst, strong in the assurance that he would do nothing to ineriminate himself, and that he eould not touch upon the subjeet of Robert Hatrell's death without jeopardising his own safety. Least of all did I believe that he would reveal himself to you as your husband's murderer. No; I felt that I had nothing to fear beyond personal annoyanee from the existence of Claude Morel; yet the memories whieh the man pressed upon me were so hideous, his presenee was so intolerable, that I would have given half my fortune to be rid of him for ever. It was as if my erime had taken a living shape and were dogging my steps. Most of all did I loathe his presenee when he eame upon me in my quiet study in this house —in the room where his erime and mine had first shaped itself in my disordered mind.

He had resolved to weary me out, I believe, and to that end he had taken a lodging at Henley. He appeared upon my pathway at all hours and in the most unexpeeted plaees, but I was roek.

We had several interviews before the one whieh was fatal to my son's peaee of mind, and whieh parted father and son for ever.

On that particular morning Morel overtook me in the lane near my cottage, and urged his demands with a savage persistence, rendered desperate, I suppose, by the disappointment of hopes which he had entertained from the hour he discovered that I was a rich man.

"You say that I knew you in London some years ago," I said, "and that we had confidential conversations together in this place, and that we two together plotted the murder of my best friend? You admit that you are a murderer, and you ask me to believe that I am one, by desire, and intention, and co-operation with you. I choose to deny all your assertions; I choose to say that I never saw your face till you forced your way into my London house. If you persist in the form of persecution which you have been carrying on for the last six weeks it will be my duty to hand you over to the police, and it will be *their* duty to discover whether you are a a lunatic at large, or whether you are really the man you pretend to be, and the murderer of Robert Hatrell. In the latter case there must be people who can identify you. Some of those witnesses at the inquest who saw the murderer go in and out of the house in Denmark Street may still be within reach of a subpœna. If you annoy me any further in my own house or out of doors it will be needful for me to take this step, and you may be sure I shall take it."

I had never been cooler than when I gave him this answer. I had weighed and measured the situation, and I did not believe he had power to harm me, be his malignity what it might. My crime might be even darker than his, but he could not touch my guilt with his little finger without his whole body being drawn into the meshes of the law. I knew that, and I could afford to laugh at his fury. To give him money, were it so much as a single sovereign, would be in somewise to acknowledge his claim and to establish a link between us. There should be no such link. And over and above this motive I abhorred the man, and his necessities had no power to touch my pity.

He could do me no harm, I thought; nor could he, but for the accident of my son's crossing the top of the lane while this man was with me, and having his attention attracted by the strangeness of the man's gestures as he talked to me. The angry flourish of his arm as he poured his rancour into my ear suggested a threat of personal violence, and my son followed us, in order to protect his

father should there be need of his interference. Once within earshot Cyril stayed his footsteps and listened to the end of a savage recapitulation of those suggestions of mine which led to the scheme of the murder, and of the sending of the telegram that furnished the information which rendered the crime possible.

He, my son, heard the history of my sin, heard and believed. I stopped at the end of the lane and looked round. Cyril stood a few paces from me, deadly pale, looking at me in terrible silence. Morel turned and saw him stand there, almost at the same moment, and slunk aside.

"How dare you insult my father with your lunatic ravings?" cried Cyril, lifting his stick threateningly; "be off with you, fellow!"

He pointed Londonwards with his stick, and Morel crept slowly along the dusty road, leaving me face to face with my son.

"You don't believe——" I began; but his face told me that he did believe Morel's story, and that nothing I could say would undo the mischief that scoundrel's tongue had done. The story of the telegram had condemned me in my son's eyes; and perhaps, too, my guilt was written upon my brow, had been written there from the beginning in characters that had deepened with the passage of time. Oh, God! how often, sitting among you all, within the sound of Daisy's innocent laughter, I have found the burden of my guilt so intolerable, that I have been tempted to cry my secret aloud and make an end of my long agony! And now I saw all the horror of it reflected in my son's agonised face as he told me that he could never be Daisy's husband, that the murderer's son must not marry the victim's daughter.

"Oh, how she would hate me," he cried, "if years after our marriage she found she had been entrapped into such a loathsome union!"

He told me that he should leave England at once, and for ever. He was not without pity for me, although my crime and the passion that prompted it lay beyond the region of his thoughts. To him such a character as mine was unthinkable.

He who could renounce love when honour urged him could not understand the love that makes light of honour, truth, friendship, all things for love's sake. His happier nature has never sounded *that* dark depth.

And so we parted. I wanted him at least to share my fortune.

There was no taint at the source of this. If he were to begin a new life, I urged that he might as well begin it with independence and comfort; but he told me he could take nothing from me, and he was resolute in his refusal.

"I am young enough to make my own way in the world," he told me; "thews and sinews must have their value somewhere."

And so we parted, just touched ice-cold hands, and parted for ever.

THE END.

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